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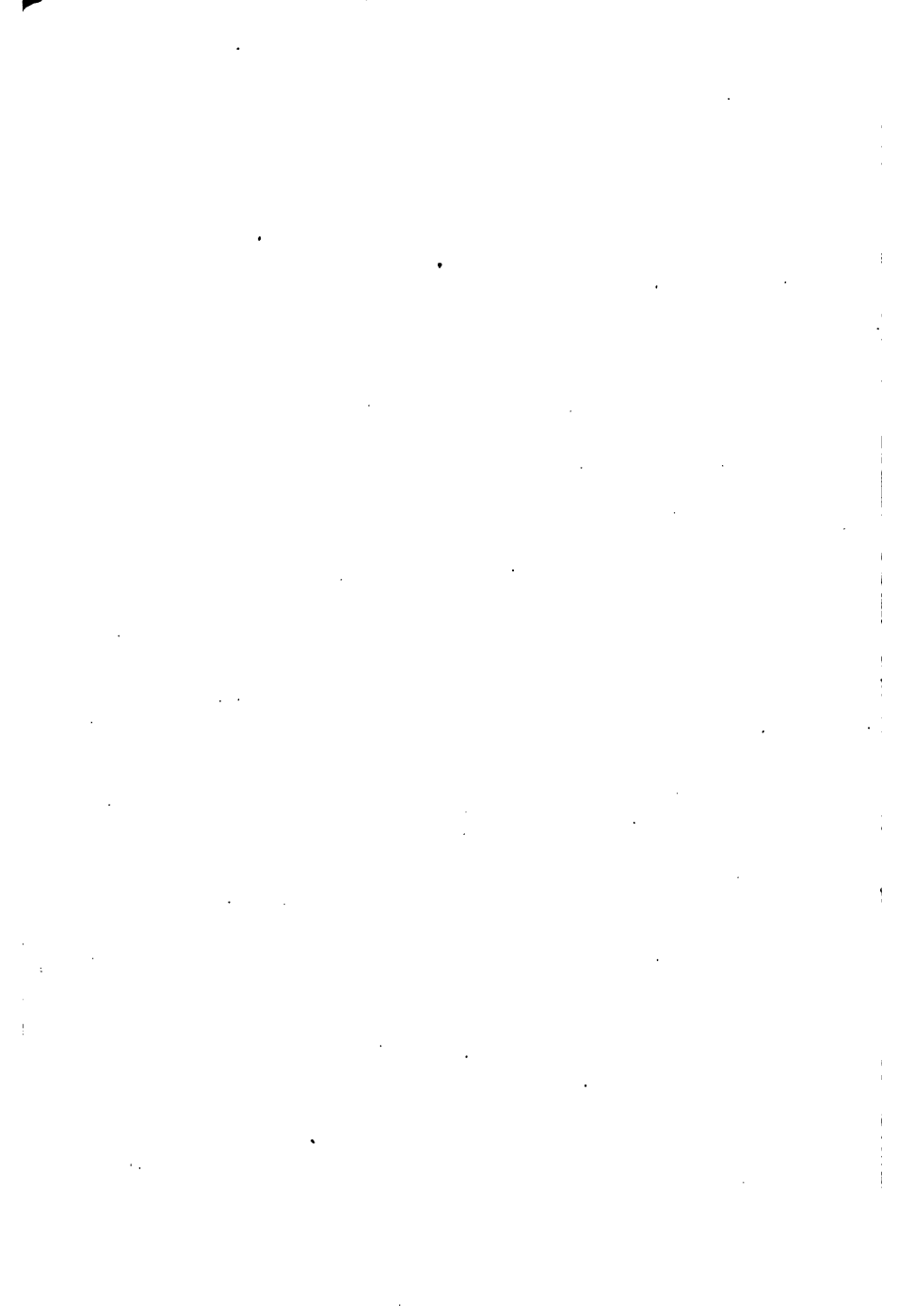
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# THE SHIP OF CORAL

H. DE VERE STACPOOLE



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Stacy



# **THE SHIP OF CORAL**

**BY DR. STACPOOLE**

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**The Crimson Azaleas**

**The Blue Lagoon**

**Garryowen**

**The Pools of Silence**

**The Drums of War**

**Patsy**

**Poems and Ballads**

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"Gaspard drew her towards him."

# THE SHIP OF CORAL

BY

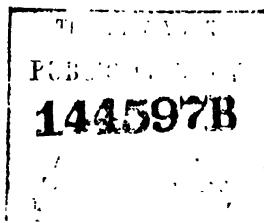
H. DE VERE STACPOOLE



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# **THE SHIP OF CORAL**

—air

# THE SHIP OF CORAL

## CHAPTER I

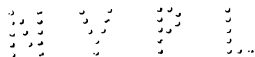
JEAN FRANÇOIS DE NANTES

JEAN FRANÇOIS—JEAN FRANÇOIS

THE sea lay blue to the far horizon. Blue—Ah, blue is but a name till you have seen the sea that breaks around the Bahamas and gives anchorage to the tall ships at Port Royal; that great sheet of blue water stretching from Cape Catoche to the Windward Islands, and from Yucatan to beyond the Bahamas, studded with banks and keys and reefs, the old sea of the Buccaneers shot over with the doings of Kidd and Singleton and Horne.

On the salt white sand in the blinding dazzle of sunlight the waves were falling, clear-green, crystalline, each lovely as a jewel. The crying of the gulls, loud all the morning, had died down with high afternoon and high tide; the wind had faded as though withered by the sun. Just at the moment of high tide the sea makes a pause in its eternal labour, the great act of systole has been accomplished and, break the waves as they may, the profound languor of the ocean makes itself heard and felt.

Gaspard Cadillac, ex-stoker of the *Rhone*, sitting with his back against a palm tree cleaning an old tobacco pipe and absorbed in the job, felt this pause and hold-up in





nature just as the gulls felt it—just as much and just as little as they.

"I have raised my horizon," said the sea. "I have lifted fleets towards heaven, hidden reefs; I have drained the occidental shores and domed with water the Indies, I rest from my labours and I dream."

Our man beneath the tree was a Moco. The French navy is divided into two great classes, the men from the south and the men from the north, the Moco and the Ponantaise.

Gaspard was a man from the south, a Provençal, dark, handsome in a rough way, wiry and vivid. Yves, his bosom companion, also a stoker of the *Rhone* and the only survivor with Gaspard of the wreck of that ill-fated ship, was a Ponantaise, a big man from Bretagne with a blond beard. Yves was over away on the other side of the little island now hunting for what he might find in the rock pools and creeks. Away out there in a right line from where Gaspard was sitting beneath the palm trees, under the blinding dazzle of sea, the *Rhone* was lying with her bottom ripped out, her boilers burst, her boats hanging smashed at her davits; a horrible travesty of a ship, knocked under the sea as if with the blow of a giant's fist, a raffle of ropes, machinery, and corpses.

The gods had been very good to Gaspard and Yves, and Gaspard had, by the direction of the gods, been the salvation of Yves. The whole catastrophe had come like a clap of thunder on a moonlit sea. The "Haa-r rip" of the reef that had been waiting a million years for the *Rhone*, the screaming of scalding steam and scalded men, a wild bellow from the siren, the roar of the boilers opening out, and the shout of the lifting decks, all that, so thunderous and apocalyptic, so full of tragedy, and torment, and woe,

filled the night for a moment for miles around, and then there was nothing but the moonlit sea.

Yves was a good swimmer, but his heart had gone out in him; he had been held down under water by the suck of the sinking ship, and he would have drowned to a certainty only for Gaspard, who was a bad swimmer but a bad drowner.

The wiry Provençal, courageous as a rat, had held Yves' head above water till Yves felt the sea slapping him in the face and saw a great spar lifting and dripping in the moonlight; saw Gaspard seize the spar, a picture almost instantaneous, a picture that told him at once the truth and made him strike out for safety.

The set of the current had carried the spar to the islet. One might have fancied that the sea, repenting for that sin of hers, had determined to save these two last survivors of the *Rhone*. But the sea cared for the men as much as she cared for the spar—less, for they were lighter.

Boxes and crates had come drifting ashore, getting caught and tangled in the reef-mesh to eastward of the islet; a horrible abundance of provisions, all sorts of articles from the cargo, corpses, spars, everything yet nothing, pounding about in the desolate reef-strewn water, made the east side of the islet a place to avoid.

The two men in the few days since the wreck had salvaged enough food to last them for months, there was a spring of water amidst the low bay cedar bushes that stretched from shore edge to shore edge, the islet was in a trade track, and they were certain of near rescue; all these circumstances made them easy of mind and made a holiday of the episode.

Gaspard having cleaned the pipe to his satisfaction, filled it with tobacco and lit it. Then he lay on his back

with his head in the scanty shade of the palm fronds, the peak of his cap over his eyes, the smoke from his pipe curling upwards in the windless air.

Windless for a moment only. The tide had turned and with the turn of the tide a faint breathing shook the palm tops against the blue. Maybe it was the breeze carrying the voices nearer, but the crying of the gulls seemed to louden with the turning tide.

Jean François de Nantes,  
Jean François, Jean François,  
Jean François de Nantes,  
Jean François, Jean François.

The old interminable song of the French navy immortalized by Loti sang in the ears of the Moco as he lay, blissful, forgetful, seeing pictures, dreaming dreams.

Now he was in the stokehold of the *Rhone* feeding furnace No. 2. He could feel the cotton waste protecting his hands from the heat of the rake; he could hear the clatter of the ash lift and the boom of the sea.

Hi! Hi! Hi! The weary, querulous call of the gulls brought up the *Tamalpais*, a three-master in which he had served for a voyage.

Hi! Hi! Hi! It was the very voices of the men hauling on the halyards; he could see the topsails bellying to the wind, the great sails held hard against the blue, the yards, the studding sail booms; away from years ago and across three thousand miles of sea came the voices of the men hauling in chorus, echoes from the past answering the lamentable crying of the gulls.

And now the *Tamalpais* went to pieces, became a curl of smoke, vanished, and he was on the wharves of Mar-

seilles, in a bar standing before a zinc counter, a chopin of wine, and a girl.

Ah! that was it, the girl; some piece of grit had been irritating his mind for the last few minutes, something behind his laziness and happiness had been working for his discomfort; we all know that feeling when the sub-conscious self is grumbling or worrying over something that the conscious self has forgotten for a moment.

Anisette was the name she went by; a pale-faced, under-sized girl. You would not, possibly, have looked at her twice, but had you done so you would, were you a man, certainly have looked at her a third time.

She was of the type that appeals to a man's passions, never to his heart, and she stood at the bar of the Riga where the Swedes and Norwegians congregate, and there Yves and Gaspard had fallen in with her and she had favoured Yves.

The big, blond Yves had captured this little pirate who had sailed for years unharmed and harmful. She had scorned Gaspard, who would have given his hand for a glance from her, and she had given herself wholly to Yves.

Had he loved the woman with a pure and simple love Gaspard might have forgiven Yves, his bosom companion, for the victory; his affection for Yves was one of those brotherly loves that ennoble a man, and the Moco was capable, perhaps, of a splendid abnegation. But Yves had crossed him in his passions and the Moco was a man who could never forgive that.

Hi! Hi! Hi!

Girl and bar and Riga tavern vanished, giving place to Marseilles harbour, with the *Rhone* thrashing her way out. A passenger had given Yves a cigar; it was always the

way; Yves had all the luck; if there was a cigar or a drink going it always fell to Yves—or a girl—yet he, Gaspard, had saved this man's life.

Now, on board ship, at work, all these grumblings would have been there in the heart of Gaspard, but they would have been undeveloped; here, in idleness, they grew; and to visualize the awful power of woman it is enough to make your mental standpoint the apex of a vast triangle the other two angles of which are Anisette serving drinks in the tobacco-smelling bar of the Riga and the Moco beneath the palm trees warring in thought against his bosom friend Yves.

A great crab fell with a thud on the sand beside Gaspard, who sprang half erect to find himself face to face with Yves.

The Ponantaise was laughing. He had caught the crab amidst the rocks; he had two more under his arm, their claws tied together with a string; he had found a boat sail from the *Rhone* and a small spar, out of which he intended to make a tent; he flung the lot on the sand and then sat down beside his companion, took out his pipe, filled it, lit it, and began to smoke.

The Moco, after his exclamation of surprise, had fallen back in his old position, and the two men smoked without interchanging a word.

They would go like this for a long time without speaking a word. One might have fancied them enemies, or at least put out at one another; not at all. They were simply sharing the tremendous taciturnity of their species. All who help in the labor of the sea share in its weariness, *Vasta Silentio*, the motto, is written on the waves.

Hi! Hi! Hi!

The breeze had freshened a bit, giving life and energy

to the calling of the gulls; the Moco, his pipe out, pushed his cap back from his eyes and sat up.

"See here," said Yves, "you know over there where I fetched these things from — well — over there I've found something."

## CHAPTER II

### A SECRET OF THE SEA

"EH BIEN?"

The big Yves laughed in his beard and dug his naked toes into the hot white sand luxuriously. Gaspard was shod, for he had turned in all standing just before the disaster to the ship; but Yves, more particular or less tired, had kicked his shoes off.

"*Eh bien?*"

"Something funny, *mordieu!* Yes, when you see it, you'll stare."

"Well, what is it? You keep on like an old woman; if you found anything funnier than yourself it would be queer."

"Well, then, come and look and you will see." Yves rose to his feet, kicked the crabs into a heap, spread the sail on the sand, and placing the crabs in the sail, made a bundle of them; having tied the bundle with a rope he placed it in the shadow of the palms.

"That will keep them safe till we come back," said Yves, "*allons.*"

He led the way right across the islet to the north.

It was scarcely a quarter of a mile wide, this islet, and covered from shore edge to shore edge with thick bay cedar bushes rising to the knees. The only trees upon it were the palms. Those seven palms gathered in the clump beneath whose shade the Moco had been lying.

The breeze, which had freshened momentarily, had now died again, and as they tramped through the dense growth the sun, now passing into the western sky, struck them on their left sides so that they could have sworn they were walking side turned to an open furnace door. But they were used to heat and neither of them grumbled, or only occasionally the Moco.

"Well, this is a nice tramp to see something funny; it seems to me the funny thing is that we should be sweating ourselves like this; if you could shew me a decent bar at the end of our journey—"

"Come on," replied Yves; "you will not be sorry when you see it."

The sea to the eastward of the island was heavily sown with reefs; the great reef that had destroyed the *Rhone* lay due south; northward there were also reefs; only to the west was the approach to the island safe.

"Here we are," said Yves, as he tramped his way out of the bushes and on to the northern beach, the Moco following.

Yes, there were reefs here, indeed, just a dark bloom under the blue water, just a trace of snow; a pencilling of foam shewed where the murderers of the sea lay hidden, and the sea was beautiful here, more beautiful than to the south of the island, for the reefs and the shallows were continually changing in the wonderful light of the tropics to suit the hour of the day; colours chasing colours, sky blue parallels of sea and heather purple lines of reef greeting the dawn, cornflower-coloured spaces of water flashing the sky back like mirrors at noon, whilst at sunset, in those wonderful sunsets that reach to the zenith, all this stretch of sea and reef would be a field of beaten gold.

Just as the ever-changing light of day made ever-chang-



ing beauties, so did the ever-changing air, and ever-changing tide; at low tide with a strong breeze every reef would speak and you would hear a sound that once heard you would never forget, the song of a hundred tiny shores, the tune of the reefs. Sometimes in those great low tides in which we fancy the moon and the sun hauling together at the heavy blue robe of the sea, as if to make her shew her hidden armour and her scars, the reefs would be fully exposed, razor-edged, hungry, and lean. In these low tides you would see great fish betrayed by the sea and trapped in the pools, flinging themselves in the air like curved silver swords. Conversely, in the great high tides you might have sailed a battleship in fancy over the unclouded water.

Yves, leaving the beach, began to clamber along a ledge of rock that went straight out from the shore like a natural pier; Gaspard followed him, treading the seaweed under foot. There were no gulls here; the fishing ground of the gulls lay to the southeast, but so small was the island that you could still hear their voices on the air that had now become absolutely windless.

The water lay deep and clear on the left of the ledge of the rocks, but Gaspard had eyes for nothing but the slippery seaweed under foot.

These reefs are as a rule so rough, so serrated with keen-edged spines of coral, that bare-footed, as Yves was, to walk on them would be impossible; but this great ledge was comparatively smooth; it lay above high tide for the first hundred yards or so, and then, shelving slightly, lost itself at high tide beneath the water.

The tide since its turn had already fallen two feet and the hidden part of the reef was beginning to shew. It was plain to the eye that the whole reef formed the edge of an

immense bath-like basin, an elliptiform lagoon, the longest diameter of which lay from north to south.

Yves led the way till they were fifty yards from the shore; then he stopped, turned, and pointed into the green clear water to the left.

The lagoon, unruffled by a breath of wind, lay lit to its heart and burning like a vast and flawless emerald, its floor of salt white sand, though invisible to the eye, was still reached by the sun rays and flung them back in a million sparkles that combined to form the water's dazzling soul.

Twenty feet out from the reef lay what seemed at first a flat-topped, reed-grown rock; the tide was slowly uncovering it and the ribbons of seaweed growing from it waved in the aquamarine of the water as grass or land foliage waves in a gentle wind. The rock, weed-grown and emerging from the water, had for a base a column thicker than a man's body, a column here dazzling bright and flower coloured, here dim and darkened with growing fucus; a column whose lowermost part was lost in the vagueness of the lagoon. The Moco, who had flung himself down and was leaning over the reef ledge so as to see better, gave a start. His sailor's eye, after the first surprise, saw through the mystery of the rock growing like a hideous flower on a coloured stalk. The rock was the foretop of a ship, the column was the coral-cruled mast.

But the mystery dispelled was as nothing to the mystery half-unveiled. To the Moco, who combined in himself the imagination of the southern man and the imagination of the sailor, this hint of a ship in the still and silent water appealed more forcibly than the full sight of a wreck on a thunderous beach.

The coral-cruled mast led the eye down till the sight found the pale, fish-like form of the ship itself.

"*Boufre*," cried the Moco; "'tis as thick as a funnel." Then he was silent as was Yves, and lying side by side on the grey dead coral of the reef, they contemplated the column of living coral that once had formed the mast of a ship.

The ship lay below unharmed as to her fore part, else the mast would not have been left standing; driven years ago by some great wave, she must have passed at one stride of the sea over the circling reef of the lagoon, to sink, the water pouring through her shattered timbers, and lie lost here forever.

Or, in those past days there may have been a break in the reef built up long ago by the restless coral. How she had found her last resting place who could say; what had been her business who could tell, but trumpets could not have proclaimed doom and death more poignantly than did the awful silence, the vagueness into which the mast sank and wavered, towards the ghostly ship.

For eight feet or so below the fore top the mast was dressed with seaweed, shewing only here and there the white of the coral crust; below that the seaweed did not grow. The eight feet indicated the rise and fall of the tide, for the lagoon, though shewing no break in its encircling reef, communicated through twenty unseen openings with the outer sea and filled and emptied to high and low water like a great cullender.

Flights of painted fishes flashed now and then through the water and vanished, the seaweeds growing from the mast shewed waving as if to a submarine wind, now like dark brown ribbons of shadow, now like a drowned woman's hair powdered with sparkling blossoms; now a tress of vivid

green would be loosened by the fingers of the outgoing tide, catch a sunbeam and shew its beauty, or a tress of amber.

As they watched and as the tide sank lower, inch by inch and foot by foot, the hidden portion of the mast jewelled with coral and sea growths stole more clearly into view, and foot by foot the seaweed portion beneath the foretop stole from the water and stood dripping, dank, and dismal in the sun, clearer and clearer like a grey cloud, fish-shaped and enormous in the green below the lost ship began to unveil herself to the sight. It was like the coming of a ghost, a thing most dim yet wonderful to be seen.

One could trace the mast, now, right down to the deck. It sprang from a coloured column from which here and there grew great sea fans that seemed made from dark lace and strewn here and there with all colours from the brilliant red of tiny starfish to the delicate peach-bloom of the flat lichen coral. So rich, so delicate, so opulent in colour, it might have been the column of some fairy palace, this old foremast of a forgotten ship.

The two men, taking comfortable positions on the reef, had lit their pipes. Hour after hour they sat smoking, interchanging a few words, but always with their eyes alive for changes in the water below. Now forgetting to smoke, they lay on their elbows looking down into the green depth where, stronger through the shallowing water, sharper, clearer, the ship began to shew her form hideous to the sight as the form of a man bloated by disease; grey, enormous, muffled with coral, tufted with what seemed fungous growths.

"Look," said Yves, pointing down to where the fantastically high poop was humping itself into view, "saw you ever a ship built in that fashion floating on the sea? Why she is from the time of Noah—In the church at Paimpol

they have a model ship like that; she was dedicated to the Virgin in the old days—"

"Let us look," growled the Moco, speaking as if irritated by the voice of his companion; then he hung silent, his eyes fixed on the vision developing below. The tide had sunk now to within a foot of low water mark, and as the veil of water lessened so did the vision strengthen; one could make out the decks clearly, all rough with coral, and the coral banks that were once the bulwarks, a stump of main-mast was left and had become converted into a cone of coral the height of a man; trace of mizzen mast there was none.

## CHAPTER III

### EVENING

ALL this time, steadily as the tide, the sun had been sinking; he had dropped through a dazzling azure sky and he was now hanging almost in touch with the western horizon, a ball of fire in a sky of dazzling gold; momentarily the gold of the sunset took possession of the sky, spreading up, up, till the very zenith was reached, and down, down, till the gilding reached the eastern sky line. The world now seemed clipped in the cup of a great golden flower, and the little ripples that came sighing in round the low tide reefs showed their foam like fleeces of gold. Not a trace of cloud shewed in the golden sky, not a wave on the golden sea; in that wonderful sunset the palm tops burned like fingers of flame, and as music lights the soul of man, so did the golden and glowing atmosphere the heart of the lagoon.

The ship in the water below answered to the magic of the light; the thing that had been grey and dismal as death was in a moment transformed to a dream of colour, the brains of frost-white coral became golden lamps; starfish, sea-flowers, coralline growths, pink, crimson, indigo, pale yellow, colour and form, all lent their adornment.

Shadowless on her bed of dazzling sand she hung for a moment, burning in full sight, clear to the eye as though she were floating in air and exquisite as a jewel, then just as she had bloomed she faded out, her colour and beauty

passing with the fading light, and as night swept over the sea like the shadow of a violet-wing, she vanished utterly, whilst the lagoon filled with darkness and the first stars cast their shimmer on its surface.

"*Eh bien?*" said Yves, as he rose to his feet and stretched himself. The Moco, who had also risen to his feet, looked around him at the world of darkness that had displaced the world of gold; he had seen many things, but nothing that had ever struck his imagination so vividly as the sight now veiled by darkness. His mind could not reason on the question or refute by logic the feeling in his heart that what he had seen was evil.

All that gaiety and colour decking the ruin of man's work was like laughter coming from under the seas.

Yves felt nothing of this.

"Come," said the Moco, turning towards the shore, "let's go back."

As they tramped their way through the brushwood they talked of the thing they had seen. Yves thought that from the height of her poop she must be very old, or it might be that it was only a very big deck-house snowed over with coral; he slapped his thigh as he walked, pleased with the idea of the snow; when a boy in Brittany he had seen things heaped with snow and bulked out in size, carts, barrels, and so forth, just as the old ship was heaped and bulked out with coral; but the simile was lost on Gaspard; you do not get snow at Montpellier to any extent; also his mind more trained by early education, and more supple by heredity, refused to draw images from gross bulk; the colours appealed to him; "*mordieu*," said he, "she reminds me most of a ship of flowers I once saw drawn along in the carnival procession at Montpellier."

"Flowers," laughed Yves, "where would you get flowers under the sea?" The stupidity of Yves roused Gaspard's ever-ready anger.

"From the devil, maybe—I was not talking of flowers under the sea; I was talking of what I had seen in Montpellier."

They had reached the southern beach, where the palm trees grew, and Yves set about lighting a fire of dry brush-wood; when it was burning he heaped on some wreck-wood; the ship of coral, the wreck of the *Rhone*, their position, all were banished from his mind by the business in hand.

When supper was finished they sat each with his back against a palm tree. The work of the day was over. They had rigged up a rough sort of tent with the boat sail and some broken spars, but the warm night held them in the open.

The red light of the fire lit the white sand to within a few yards of the sea edge, where the waves were falling gently, rhythmically, drowsily, Haassh—Haassh—Haassh—a chill and dreamy sound. Above, the sky solid with stars, voiceless, windless, seemed a thing more alive and active than the sea. From the slight elevation where they sat a ghostly white streak on the starlit sea to the southward indicated the reef that had slain the *Rhone*; only at low tide and half way between flood and ebb tide did the snow of the surf indicate the position of the murderer.

"She had a lot of gold in her for Havana," said Yves, breaking silence and nodding in the direction of the reef; "seems a pity that it should be lying there under the sea and no one to spend it."

"See here," said Gaspard, "it's strange I was thinking of that hooker lying in the lagoon over there."



"Yes?"

"I was thinking, maybe, there is stuff worth looking for a'board her if one could get at it."

Yves laughed.

"Yes, if you could get at it—if you could get at it—and she built over with coral a foot thick; and if you could break through it what would you find? dead men's bones. It's like your flowers under the sea." He tapped the dottle out of his pipe, rose, stretched, and turned toward the little tent, whilst Gaspard without a word continued smoking; he could have struck Yves.

The son of a tradesman in Montpellier, he possessed still some rudiments of the education he had received before that fatal day when, driven by the instinct of wandering and the hatred of restraint, he had run away to sea. Yves, the son of long generations of sailors, had gone to sea as a duckling goes to the pond. Gaspard had been taken there by his imagination. He knew himself superior to the lumbering Yves whose fingers were like fish-hooks, who had the manners of a bear and the walk of a walrus, yet Yves was always proving himself (by chance, no doubt) the better and the luckier man.

He turned in under the shelter of the tent where Yves was already snoring, and he slept and dreamt of the docks of Marseilles, of Anisette, and of Yves.

## CHAPTER IV

### SPANISH GOLD

FROM the salt-white sand of the beach to eastward, and some two hundred yards from the palm-clump a ridge of coral rocks ran out into the sea like a natural pier. The water lay deep off these rocks and the fishing would have been good had the ship-wrecked ones possessed lines and hooks.

Gaspard, next day, late in the afternoon was standing at the end of this coral pier, the sea of an incredible blue, sail-less, forlorn, came glassing shoreward in long gentle lines of swell, slobbering and sighing by the rocks and breaking sadly on the sands.

When the sea comes in like this in long spaced undulations a voice steals through her voice, the something tragic, the *quid obscurum* that hides in nature and speaks through the elements and the passions is heard. The sea has a hundred voices, Gaiety, Triumph, Strength, Sadness, Regret, the wave speaks them all. But stand on a day like this on a desolate island in the tropics and listen to the voice that steals from all that splendour of light and gaiety of colour, the violent heaving wastes of water, the triumphant sun, the sky of living blue, through all these, from all these you will hear a voice, it is borne by the languid voice of the sea.

It is the voice of Loneliness.

Loneliness—Fate, Death, Tragedy—all these are dwarfed before her, to escape from whom the very atoms of matter cling together, animals join in herds, men in communities.

She who says to man "I walk by you from the cradle to the grave, with me you go forth from the world alone, because of me you work out your fate alone, by the shores and desolate plains of the north I shew my face, by the tropic sea men hear my voice. I am she who makes Death terrible. I am she who makes Love beautiful. Love my only enemy."

Gaspard, standing on the reef, heard the voice, his eyes were fixed on the green water in the shadow of the rocks, an albicore like a flashing sword had passed a moment ago, now there was nothing to be seen but the crystalline vagueness through which here and there floated a scrap of fucus. Just in that second, held between the sound of the sea and the mesmeric crystal of the water his mind heard Loneliness speak. Just in that moment was borne in on him dimly, and without awakening true comprehension, the tragic fact of human isolation, the fact that each man is on a desert island set round by the sea of life, and that there alone he must work out his fate, unless from some island in the distance Love should bring him help.

The fact came to him as a sensation rather than a thought, the grave harmonics of the sea had whispered to him this eternal truth, the fact which is the master fact of life.

Suddenly, from behind, as he stood there gazing into the depths came a voice that made him turn. Yves far away amidst the low bushes was beckoning and calling to him, capering, gesticulating, flinging his arms about. Yves seemed to have gone mad, and Gaspard, making along the rocks, ran across the sand, and through the bushes towards him.

Over the bushes the air was shaking with the heat, Yves was much farther off than he had seemed from the rocks;

he was almost at the centre of the islet, and now as Gaspard made his way through the bushes he saw that his companion held something in his hand.

"Hurry up, lazy bones," cried Yves, "and see what I have found." He waved the thing in the air, it was a belt with a brass buckle and a pouch attached to it. He was laughing, one might have fancied that he had fallen on some great, good fortune.

He had.

"Look," cried Yves. He opened the pouch, it was filled with big pieces of gold; they had been wrapped in oilskin, he had flung the oilskin away and he stood with his two great hands outspread clasping the pouch and the treasure bursting from it.

Gaspard at the sight gave a cry that rang across the islet and was answered by the ever-wheeling gulls.

"Gold!" cried Gaspard, seizing a piece from the hand of Yves. He examined it, bit it, glanced at it again. He seemed dazed and had the look of a man who, long a prisoner in darkness, had been suddenly brought face to face with a powerful light. The piece of gold was Spanish, a piece of eight, heavy, and stamped with the stately effigies of a vanished king.

"Look!" cried Yves, taking the coin back from the hand of Gaspard and replacing it in the pouch with the others. "Look!" As he buckled the pouch he pointed with his foot at something amidst the bushes. Just here the bushes were thinner than elsewhere and here the ground was raised in a little mound. Amidst the bushes, white and desolate, lay some bones. They were strewn hither and thither. One might have fancied that here once lay a skeleton, the embers of a man that some wind had blown upon and scattered. A skeleton, in fact, had once lain here, on or

amongst the bushes, but so long ago that the bushes dying and growing again had cast the fragments apart. The skeleton of a man; the skull which Gaspard had picked up and was now holding in his hand told that.

It was a strange skull, small and deformed, hideously broad across the cheek-bones; the bones of the thigh easily distinguished by even the untrained eyes of the sailors were unequal in length, the shorter of them had been injured or broken, for it shewed the thickening where callus had formed.

"Pah!" cried Gaspard, flinging the skull down. "He must have been a beauty whoever he was—and look." He picked up an old pistol-barrel, eaten away by rust, the trigger plate thin as a leaf and crumbling like a withered leaf to the touch lay near. Many, many years of exposure it must have taken to eat the metal away like that. Yves glanced at the thing without interest. "Come," said he, and turning, he led the way to the southern beach. Here under the palm trees he sat down, opened the pouch, and rattled the gold pieces on the sand between his outspread legs.

Gaspard, who had followed him without a word, stood, without a word, looking on.

Yves counted the pieces; there were twenty-one of them and he was disappointed; there had seemed more. He began to recount them. He had scarcely done so when Gaspard broke silence.

"Look here," said Gaspard, "half of that falls to my share; half of that belongs to me by all rights."

Yves stopped his counting and looked up. It was the tone of Gaspard's voice rather than his words, perhaps, that caused the expression upon his broad, sun-burnt face. A heavy, unfriendly expression, such as the face of a

croupier might wear when some punter disputes the game.

"Yours?" said Yves, "and who found them?"

"That's neither here nor there," said the Moco, "you found them, it is true, but it was only a question of luck. I might have found them just as easily, and if I had I would have gone shares."

Yves knew this to be a fact. Gaspard was the soul of generosity. Generosity was not predominant in the soul of Yves. He was a good-hearted man, but the Breton peasant was uppermost in his nature; he had made this great haul of golden fish entirely with his own hand, and now he was called upon by a man more generous than himself to share it.

He said nothing for a moment, but went on counting the pieces; then, as if addressing them, "Yes, it's easy to talk of luck—but would I have found them if I had been lying lazy on the beach, or staring into the sea like some people? No, I was hunting for dead brushwood, doing something for my living, and I found them."

"Then keep them," cried Gaspard, and turning on his heel he walked down to the sea edge. He walked for a bit along the sand, then, with his arms folded, he stood looking at the sea.

His mind had left the subject of the money and was clinging to the true grievance he had against Yves. The poisonous source of hatred. Anisette.

But the grievance of the money was there as well, and all at once by some alchemy of Satan the hundred grudges petty and large that he had against his companion joined together and formed the figure of a monstrous Yves, a creature he hated, and who, so the devil whispered, hated him.

The sun was now near its setting, and as Gaspard stood

there with arms folded looking at the sea, the eternal crying of the gulls took on a new meaning; they were saying a new word:

"Yves,—Yves,—Yves."

It seemed as though the very gulls were mocking him.

"Yves,—Yves,—Yves."

He turned and strode up the sand to where Yves was sitting beneath the palm trees.

The sun was sinking now over Tampico way in a sky of living gold, the western sea, leaping to meet him, flashed his splendour to the very shores of the islet; each flake of foam seemed a flake of primrose light and the sands stretched like sands of gold by the shores of the golden sea.

Gaspard came right up to Yves, the splendour of the sunset on his face, his hands clenched in his pockets, his lips dry.

"All the same," said Gaspard, as though he were continuing a conversation, "you are a thief, and a son of a thief—more fool I to chum with a dog of a Ponantaise."

Yves rose up; he was a slow man to wrath, but terrible when roused. The belt and the pouch containing the money were lying at his feet; he kicked them aside as he faced the Moco.

"You say—"

"I say what I have said."

"After the fashion of the monkeys," replied Yves, "that say what they have said all day long—*drop that!*"

The Moco had whipped the knife from the sheath in his belt. Both men wore knives, but the Ponantaise had not drawn his. He stood with his arms folded across his immense chest, literally as though he were nursing his wrath.

"It is well known," said Yves, his eye on the knife, "that a Moco and a woman can only fight with their claws and tongue."

Gaspard dropped the knife; then he stooped and picked it up as if to replace it in his belt; he seemed half mad with rage and not to know what he was doing.

That was the moment of his life; the next he might have replaced the knife in its sheath and all would have been well, had not Yves, whose anger had suddenly passed from his control, spat at the Moco a word.

A word of one syllable, one of those dead rats of language that these men fling at one another in jest, but when spoken in anger are worse than a blow.

The Moco flung himself back as though a snake had struck at him, then the knife in his hand flashed through the air and Yves was on his back on the sand kicking and coughing and whistling at the sky.

The knife had just touched the jugular vein in his neck; the air rushing into the vein made the whistling noise, but Gaspard knew nothing of this. He strode up to the body of his companion with fists clenched, prepared for battle, and certain that his antagonist would spring to his feet and face him.

Then he saw that Yves was dying. Dying of nothing, apparently, for the knife was on the sand almost unstained and the stricken man shewed no wound to speak of, just a scratch on the neck from which the black blood oozed in froth.

Had Gaspard raised his eyes to the west he would have seen that the great sun was now cut in half by the sea, dying in a scene of splendour indescribable, but he saw nothing, nothing, but the face of Yves.



For a moment he stood, the last fiery rays of the sun casting his shadow far away along the sand. Then he was kneeling by the body, shaking it by the arm, calling upon it to wake up—to come to life!

## CHAPTER V

### AMIDST THE BUSHES

AFTER the first outburst of raving, impetuous grief, the grief of a child rather than the grief of a man, Gaspard rose up from where he had cast himself down by Yves. The sun had long passed from the sky and the star-smitten sea came in smoothly, rhythmically, breaking in foam on the starlit sands, and there on the sand lay Yves, listening to what the sea was saying.

His great right fist, clenched, was lying on his breast; one might have fancied that the meaning of it all and the mystery of that sky so filled with fire and passionate life, and those wastes of the ever-fretting sea, had been revealed to him in one stupendous moment, that he had struck himself on the breast in the stupefaction of wonder that he was gazing and listening, motionless before the revelation forevermore.

Yves from a common man had become at once and at a stroke a part of the immensity and the wonder of the night, the reachless stars and the fathomless sea; and, for a moment, Gaspard, standing before the body of the man he had slain, saw death as the prehistoric man saw it before language had robbed thought of its freshness and power. For a moment only, and then the stars became the stars again, and the sea the sea, and the dead body of Yves the body of a man he had slain in anger.

And now that his southern nature had spent itself in a

wild outburst of grief just as a child spends itself in an outburst of weeping, thought came back.

Well, then?—whose fault was it?

The knife was flung with no intent to kill,—what right had he to die of a scratch like that?—and then the vile word—that was the last of a long series of injuries. And bit by bit his mind went back counting up the score of these “injuries,” right back to the tobacco-smelling bar of the Riga and to Anisette as he had last seen her, with her little grimy hand resting on the great hairy paw of Yves. That remembrance like a hideous lamp lit up all his grievances, enlarging them two-fold. No, he was not to blame; he had not meant to kill, and if he had, *Dieu de Dieu*, look at the provocation!

He stood for a moment, his chin resting in his hand, his eyes on the body before him; then he turned and, walking down to the sea-edge, dipped his hands and washed his face in the foam. As he turned up the beach again towards the trees, wiping his streaming face with the sleeve of his coat, he felt as though all the occurrences of the last few hours had happened years ago, so remote did they seem for the moment. The sight of the body lying there so still in the starlight brought him to a pause. Grief rushed back on him, driving all little and evil things from his mind. He stood looking at his handiwork. It had been an accident; he had not meant to kill; he did not even remember flinging the knife. The act had been automatic and committed in blind rage—all the same, he had killed Yves.

Then, loathing the business which had to be done, he seized the body of his dead companion by the shoulders and began to drag it towards the bushes.

\* \* \* \* \*

As he stepped from the bushes, his task accomplished, he cast his eyes over the beach. It lay white in the starlight, and there was nothing now to tell of tragedy but the knife lying there just as it had fallen after its murderous work. He picked it up, dug it in the sand, and replaced it in its sheath. The belt with the pouch of money lay under the trees; he picked it up automatically and, carrying it in his hand, turned to the little tent.

As he walked towards the tent two heavy hands seemed pressing down on his shoulders; unutterable weariness had suddenly fallen upon him, robbing him of mind and almost of movement, so that when he reached the tent he was staggering like a drunken man.

He crept under the shelter of the tent, and with the belt and the money beside him fell into a profound and dreamless sleep.

## CHAPTER VI

### ALONE

WHEN he awoke it was full day and the sands beyond the tent opening lay white and blazing in the sunlight down to the blue, lazy sea.

He remembered everything at once. It would almost have seemed that his mind behind the veil of sleep had been reasoning the matter out, for he had awakened saying to himself out loud, and as if he were continuing a conversation, "Yes—and what is more, I saved his life." He crawled from the tent and stood erect beneath the palms. The morning, warm, sweet, and sunlit, lay around him; the sapphire sky and flashing sea; snow-white gulls and snow-white sands. A hot, gentle wind was stirring the palm fronds. He collected some dry brushwood for the fire, lit it, and piled on some wood from the wreck. When it was alight, flickering a hundred red tongues at the sun and staining the blue air with smoke, Gaspard was brought to his first pause. Of what use was the fire? He was no good as a cook. Yves had been the cook; he had cooked crabs, tinned meat, and what-not, using an old tin for a billy; he was born for that sort of work and could do anything practical he turned his hand to.

Yves had always done the cooking whilst Gaspard had looked on. This fact struck Gaspard for the first time now. It was as though the dead Yves was still proclaiming his superiority. Yves had salved most of the

stores, Yves had hunted for dead brushwood, Yves had found crabs, Yves had found the spring of water, Yves had found the boat-sail, Yves had built the tent, Yves had found the ship of coral in the lagoon, Yves had found the gold. Yves had done everything since their landing, and he, Gaspard, had done nothing but smoke and dream.

Far from being a waster, he had, still, left everything to the big blond man so full of energy and resource and the joy of life; the southern laziness had held possession of him. All the same, Yves had proved himself the better man and was proving the fact now, voiceless and dead amidst the bushes as he was.

Gaspard kicked the fire to pieces and flung sand on the embers; then he breakfasted on some ship's biscuit and some tinned meat, lit his pipe and strolled down to the sea-edge.

It was eight o'clock and the gasping warm wind came in over the morning sea, the lazy, deep blue sea, so infinite, so beautiful, so desolate.

He stood, and, shading his eyes, he swept the horizon—not a trace of sail or smoke could he see. The sky, of a burning emerald just above the sea-line, swept up into the burning blue, and from sea and sky, like the breath from a great blue mouth, came the warm wind. It felt like a woman's hot fingers playing with his hair, like a woman's warm arm cast round his neck.

From the southeast with the wind, now loud, now low, came the crying of the gulls. Though he had heard them since awakening, he had not noticed them till now; he turned his eyes to where they were wheeling and flying spirit-white in the blue.

It was at this moment that Loneliness seized his heart. The fact of his utter isolation had not stood before him

full square till just now. The gulls were explaining it to him.

"You are alone!—alone!—alone! Hi!—Hi!—Hi!—you there on the sands alone!—alone!—alone!—we have nothing to do with you—we are nothing to you—alone there on the sands—all day long and night and day, and night and day, who will you speak to—what will you do? You there on the sands alone!—alone!—alone!"

He drew his sleeve across his brow to wipe away the sweat that had suddenly started tingling through his skin; then he cast his eyes again over the sailless blue of the sea and, turning, came back to the tent. When he reached it the terror left him, fell from him suddenly like a dropped cloak. He cursed himself for his stupidity and, though his pipe was not half exhausted, he tapped the tobacco out, re-filled and lit it. It was something to do. Then, to drive the thought of Yves away, he fell to imagining what sort of a ship would take him off the island, and then he stretched his hand into the tent and pulled out the belt and pouch of money. On the brass buckle of the belt, all green with verdigris, there was something scratched. He cleaned the brass with sand—it was something to do—and made out what seemed the initials "S. S." He pondered on these for a while and then, opening the pouch, he turned the contents on to the sand.

Though he knew the number of coins, he counted them again and again—it was something to do. Then he began to spend them in fancy, the remembrance of the tragedy of yesterday always standing like a ghost behind his thoughts and trying to obtrude itself.

This occupation lasted him an hour, and he was brought back from it suddenly by a tug at his heart. It was still morning; the awful day had scarcely progressed; the

mantle of Loneliness had fallen on him again; the gulls were still crying, calling, wheeling, rising, falling, fishing mechanically and seeming part of a tireless mechanism fretting the speechless blue of the sky.

He put the coins back in the pouch and flung belt and pouch into the tent; then he rose to his feet and made towards the bushes.

On the sand still lay a mark as though a heavy sack had been dragged along it towards the bushes.

He avoided the pointing of the sinister path and struck across the islet, crushing the brushwood under foot. He had no object other than to get away from the place where he was, to keep in motion—to be doing something. The heat lay heavy over the bay cedars, the air was shaking blanket-fashion under the fiery rays of the sun, the bushes were dense, yet in a trice it seemed to him he had reached the northern beach. The islet seemed to have led him across it to explain its smallness, and as he stepped on to the beach a new sensation caught him in its grip. The sensation of being ringed in, enclosed in a small circle from which there is no escape.

Yet there were no bars, and around him on every hand stretched infinity.

He came along the reef forming the edge of the lagoon; the tide was beginning to flood and the foretop of the ship was standing stark and dry from the water; the ship herself was clearly to be seen, in this light even more clearly than in the sunset glow. But the picture was far less beautiful.

Grey and dead she seemed, lying there in the diamond-clear emerald of the water, but the lagoon this morning was gay with fish, parrot-fish, gropers, flights of coloured arrows, sapphire, ruby and emerald-tinted ghosts.



The swell of the incoming tide came slobbering over the reef; shutting one's eyes one might have fancied a giant shuddering and catching his breath and sobbing to himself.

Gaspard stood for a long time watching the moving life of the lagoon, absorbed, as a child might be before the contents of an aquarium. He had forgotten Loneliness for a moment, but she had not forgotten him. As he stood with his eyes fixed on a large fish, sapphire and mist-grey, that had developed like a spirit and was now hanging motionless with moving gills above the ship, casting a vague shadow upon the coral-crust ed deck; as he stood watching it, the breeze strengthened, stirring his hair, and on the breeze a voice hailed him, far away and weary.

"Hi! Hi! Hi!—you there on the reef. Hi! Hi! Hi!—you there alone!—alone!—alone!—see how the wind takes us, wheeling, fishing, forever—alone—alone—alone."

He turned his face to where, across the islet, far away in the blue, the gulls' white wings were winking and beckoning to him; their voices, thinned by distance, had a desolation rendered even more desolate by the gorgeour of the burning blue sky, the triumphant sunlight, the licking of the warm weak wind.

There is no desolation so terrible as the desolation that lies in summer warmth and blue skies. Here life ought to have been superabundant, but here there was no life or moving thing save the wind and the gulls and the waves.

"God!" said the Moco. He thrust his clenched fist in his pocket and, turning from the lagoon, made his way along the rocks to the shore.

He returned to the south of the islet, not through the bushes, but along the eastern sea-edge where the reefs were like rows of teeth and the rock edges like razors. Here

it was that most of the wreckage of the *Rhone* had come ashore, and here there was still wreckage enough, in all truth. Here was something to do.

In a moment he was up to his knees in water. The *Rhone*, when the explosion of the boilers rent her asunder, had cast wreckage enough upon the water, but even still, as she lay beneath the surface, sinking more and more completely to ruin, things were breaking loose from her and rising as bubbles rise from a submerged body, and drifting ashore with the tide. Hencoops, boxes, spars, barrels, were pounding about in the surf. Heavy spars were here, all chawn and frayed by the reefs; the coral teeth had left their marks on everything; there was nothing worth salving, yet Gaspard worked like a dock labourer, hauling upon spars, heaving at barrels, forgetting Loneliness in the exertion of manual labour.

But she was there, and her voice forever speaking, subtle, like a music interpenetrating all things from the sound of the wave to the silence of the sky, made itself heard again.

As the power of friction brings a machine to a pause, so did this voice, which was a part of the sunlight, a part of the silence, a part of the blueness of sea and sky, bring Gaspard to a stand.

He wiped his brow and looked at the heap of things he had collected. He remembered how Yves had laboured at the same job, and now, for the first time since the tragedy, as he stood looking at the heap of spars and wreckwood, a feeling of pity came to his heart for the man lying there dead amidst the bay-cedar bushes.

The outburst of grief to which he had given way on the evening before was, to speak truth, an outpouring of his southern nature; anger suddenly checked and flung

back by Death, inverted and bursting forth furiously at the sight of the irreparable result of his anger.

But this feeling of pity for Yves came from the depths of his soul, for it was born of pity for himself.

It was fatal for this feeling to enter his heart just now, for the heart, softening towards the dead, opened the door for superstition to enter.

He thought of the tent over there beneath the palms and how pleasant it would be if, on his return, he were to find Yves sitting by the tent. Then, with a chill of horror, came the idea—how awful it would be if on his return he were to find Yves sitting by the tent! His imaginative mind played with this idea for a moment and then cast it hurriedly away. He laughed out loud to reassure himself, and the steady wash of the sea made answer and the distant gulls. Then, leaving the salvage bleaching in the burning sunlight, he came towards the southern beach.

No; there was nobody by the tent, but the wind was playing with a loose corner of the sail-cloth, flapping it about. The tent seemed beckoning to him as he came towards it across the white, blazing sands. Everything—every sound, every gesture of animate or inanimate nature, was beginning to have a deep and extraordinary significance for Gaspard. The silence, the sunlight, and the blueness had first conspired to shew him his loneliness; the gulls had insisted on it, gloated over it, explained it; but now, since over there by the wreckwood the pity for Yves and his fate had entered into his heart, the gulls, the silence, the sunlight, and the blueness were speaking a language less assured. "Are you alone? Hi! you there on the sands, what's that beckoning to you? Hi! Hi! The wind flaps the tent? Ha! ha! Hi!"—and then silence

for a moment, and then, weak, weary, querulous, from the circling white spirits away there in the smoky blue of midday—"Yves—Yves—Yves."

The very poetry of Loneliness, Distance, Blueness, Regret—fatal regret.

Gaspard fastened up the flap, and the wind, as if vexed at being robbed of its plaything, shook the palm fronds, and then some of the finest of the sand on the beach gathered itself up into a little sand devil and danced away on the wind. An unseen hand seemed moving everywhere fitfully, now here, now there, touching the sand, touching the trees, touching the bay-cedar bushes. Gaspard, as he lay with his head in the shade of the tent resting after his exertion, listened to the faint patter of the palm fronds and the whisper of the sand; sometimes the sail-cloth of the tent would lift a bit to the wind.

It was only the wind, yet it moved like a living thing. Sometimes he imagined a hand lifting the tent-cloth back and a voice saying, "Hullo! what are you doing here?" He imagined Yves as the possessor of the voice, and he drove the imagination from his mind.

Never for a moment did he feel fear of the body lying away there amidst the bushes; not for the worth of the *Rhone* would he have gone through the bushes to look at it and see how it was faring at the hands of corruption, yet he felt no fear of it; on the contrary, it was the thing he dwelt on when he wished to allay fear. For fear, faint and indefinable, was taking hold upon him now. He had no compunction about the part he had played in the death of Yves. The thing was an accident, so he told himself; all the same, men who die suddenly and violently have a habit of haunting the place where they die.

You can run from a haunted house, but you cannot run

from a haunted island. This dread of no escape was what formed the true basis of his fear, a thing on which to build terrible and fantastic edifices. He lit a pipe and, smoking it, he fell asleep, awakening in an hour or so refreshed and fearless. Sleep seemed to have wiped away Loneliness, superstition, and all their attendant evils. He felt hungry, and getting some tinned meat and biscuit from the store of provisions which lay close to the trees he dined after a fashion, and then lit a pipe.

It was now half-past three, the gulls had ceased crying and afternoon lay on the island like a hot, heavy hand. So still seemed everything that one might have fancied the islet wrapped in idyllic peace; but it was the peace that broods over fermentation. The air over the sands was shaking in waves and a faint hum of insect life came from the bushes. A torrid and tremendous pyramid of light stood upon nature, crushing her to silence yet unable to stifle her faint fret and murmur.

At four o'clock Gaspard was standing at the end of the little pier of coral reef just at the place where he had been standing yesterday, when Yves' voice had called him to see the treasure. There were no fish visible in the water to-day, nothing floated there but an occasional scrap of seaweed. The clear water, bright as a diamond and green as an emerald, held the gaze with the fascination that lies in a globe of crystal. Out here at the end of the projecting spur of reef, with the sea on either side, one felt as though one were standing on the deck of a boat.

It was pleasant out here with the sea coming in gently around the rocks, leaving scarcely a trace of foam, scarcely a trace of sound; the islet was singing to the little waves, but the reef only gurgled, slobbered slightly when a higher ridge of swell lapped the more exposed portions, and

sighed as the water sinking exposed the weeds, the clinging shells, and the coralline growths.

Gaspard, standing, looking into the green depths, mesmerized by their crystal clearness and thinking of nothing, was suddenly brought to consciousness by the feeling that someone was standing close behind him. He wheeled round. Nothing. The reef, the islet, sea and sky were destitute of life, yet distinctly he had felt as though someone were standing behind him, almost in touch with him, almost breathing upon his neck; and he felt that if he had turned more sharply he would have caught sight of the viewless one; and the reef, the islet, sea and sky, had for a moment a simpering look, as though they had succeeded in the trick of snatching the Unseen One away before he could be glimpsed.

The absurdity of this idea destroyed it almost as soon as it was born. He shook the sensation off with a little shiver and, casting his eyes over the sea-line again as if in search for a ship, he began to walk along the reef back to the shore.

He was stepping from the reef on to the sand, when upon the sand he saw something that brought his breathing to a stop. The imprint of a naked foot.

It was a foot-mark left by Yves, and there was nothing supernatural about it at all; it had been left on the previous day, and it was still sharp and clear, for a ledge of the reef had protected it from the wind and the blowing sand; but to Gaspard it was more terrible than the naked face of Death.

He walked away from the terrible thing with his hand clutching at his heart, his eyes cast from side to side, not daring to look back. He did not know where he was going, but his feet led him to the palm clump.

Here he sat down with his back to a tree bole. The terror was behind him and the tree seemed to fend it off. The tree was a living thing; all at once it had stepped out of the semi-inanimate world where trees dwell and flowers, and had become a living personality. In his supreme terror he could have turned and embraced it, but he was afraid for a moment to move from his position, just as a man is afraid to move who, attacked by enemies, has his back to a wall.

Such terror does not last in its entirety for more than a brief space of time. Reason came to his assistance. He remembered that Yves had been by the reef end on the day before. The foot-mark was a real thing. No ghost could have left it.

He was telling himself this when,

"Hi! Hi! Hi!"

Loud, shrill, heart-snatching came a hail right from behind him. It was the voice of Yves, and springing to his feet with a scream, Gaspard, clinging to the tree-bole, looked.

A great black man-o'-war bird with bright eyes and coral-red beak was passing over the islet and hailing it as it passed.

Tremendous, definite, and strong against the blue, yet more soundless in flight than an arrow, it passed overhead without a motion of the wings.

As it passed it hailed the island once again, and once again from far out at sea, motionless, but fast dwindling till it became a faint speck and was lost in the blue to southward.

Gaspard, breathing freely again, watched the great bird losing itself in nothingness, lifting veil after veil of sky,

and horizon after horizon of sea, bound for some port of call in the Windwards or beyond.

The shock had been better than medicine to him, shewing him his own superstition and the stupidity of his alarm. The island seemed suddenly freed from the haunting presence; he began to doubt himself. If a bird could make a fool of him like that, he must be a fool indeed.

A year seemed to have passed since sunrise and the sun was now dropping to the sea, bringing to its end that vast blue day so filled with loneliness and the terrors of the unknown.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE BOAT

**MOST** of us have never known the day as it is and the night as it is. Protected from the wind and the sunlight by walls and houses, by artificial light from the darkness, by words from the truth, we have created an artificial world in the midst of the true world. In the wind, in the sunlight, in the sea, there are voices speaking a language long forgotten; lost when thought, becoming vocal, set up a language of its own and a tower of Babel in the world of dreams. Even still, when alone in the solitudes, on the moors, on the mountains, by the sea, through all the clap-trap of language and thought come the voices; the true, eternal voices that were before we were and will be when we are not.

Voices of which all art, in marble, in tone, or in words, is but the pathetic imitation, an echo dulled and muffled and debased. In this lies the eternal despair of art.

To the mind of the commonest man, if he be imaginative, the language of the eternal things is louder far than to the mind of the most cultivated man if he be only imitative.

Gaspard's mind was of the imaginative order. Up to this, in the forecastle or stoke-hold, on board ship or on shore, he had been held apart by his fellows or protected by the common things from the eternal truths. Loneliness in her extremest form had brought him in touch with them; or at least within whispering distance.

The great blue day, dying now, had searched his heart and mind; it was as though the old gods of nature had landed on the island and stood around him viewless and perplexing him with whispers. Fear, Air, Distance, Light, and Sea had spoken to him in turn and in chorus; Loneliness had echoed what they said.

There was something more in the wind and the sun and the sky and the sea than he had known of up to this; the drinking-bar, the forecastle, the sailors' lodging-house, those black holes had hidden him from this knowledge; a debased language in which the word "sea" stood for wharves and ships, stoke-holds and furnaces, decks and glimpses of ocean had paralysed his thought and numbed it. Twelve hours of loneliness and fear, face to face with nature, had loosened the old false labels from the truths of things and, without a glimpse of the real truths, a dim recognition of the falsities unsettled his mind.

The damning mesmerism of language had suspended itself partly for a moment in this partly unsophisticated mind, and as he sat watching the sun sink in the western sea, the word "sunset" or the word "sea" never occurred to him. He was thinking without language, lost in contemplation, like an animal viewing from a distance a new and curious but undisturbing phenomenon.

And the sight was tremendous as ten million cubic leagues of golden air could make it. Fire, Light, and Distance were there at this marriage of sun and ocean; colour, size, limit, all were banished from the infinite, indefinite universe of gold through which the golden sun was sinking to the golden sea.

The sun had almost reached the sea-line and for a moment Ocean and Sun hung apart, the splendour of the sea answering the splendour of the sky. For a moment time

seemed to cease and silence supreme, everlasting, golden, and beautiful, held the West in her keeping.

A moment—and then, flashing, palpitating, leaping like a woman under a burning kiss, the great sea flung her arms up to her lover.

Destroying him utterly and almost in a moment, washing him away, melting him as though he who had been fire had become wax and the wax had been cast into a cauldron of boiling gold. Then, as if millions of infinitely tenuous golden veils were being stripped away with the rapidity of thought, bluer and bluer, darker and darker, appeared the night behind them.

A hand seemed sprinkling and spraying the sky with stars.

One could scarcely say, "It is night," before night had taken possession of the world and the night-wind was blowing in the palms.

Gaspard, rising, stretched himself and then crept under the shelter of the tent; the opiate of the sea air and his weariness brought sleep at once, profound, dreamless sleep which lasted till just before dawn.

He was awakened by a sound.

Someone close to the tent had, so it seemed to him, struck a single blow on a drum. He raised himself on his arm; sleep had fallen from him like a cloak, and his mind was alert again, and alive to fear.

He listened, but heard nothing except the weary washing sound of the waves on the beach.

Then, as he listened, it came again, but from a distance. Boom! A monstrous sound in that desolate place, alarming and uncanny as the sound of a trumpet.

If it were a drum note, then, judging by the sound, the drum must be of Gargantuan size.

With the sweat running from his face he crept out from under the tent and stood beneath the trees.

Nothing. The new moon had risen and was floating like a little silver boat amidst the stars; the starlight flooded the sea and brimmed over on to the foam. So solid was the sky with stars that the palm fronds cut their silhouettes on it sharply and distinctly. Never was there a more lovely southern night.

As he stood and listened, again, from very far away this time, came the sound.

Boom! As though the drummer had stridden away leagues across the sea to beat his drum around the world before dawn.

Had Gaspard known these waters the sound would have had less terror for him. It was the sound of great devil-fish, sea-bats that rise from the water, quiver for a moment in the air, and then fall, smashing the waves to foam, with a noise that reverberates for miles. But he knew nothing of the sea-bats, and he stood pursuing in his mind the drummer who had beaten this strange *réveil* and with his eyes fixed on the horizon to eastward where the sky was stained by the dawn.

It came, killing the stars, clear and cold in tint, beneath a sky shifting in colour from smoke-grey to aqua-marine and icy blue. Then it bloomed into warmth and kindness of tone. Just as children hold buttercups to one another's faces to see the yellow reflection, so one might suppose some hand beneath the horizon was holding a vast buttercup to the dawn's pallid face.

A thread of living gold stole along the sea-line, became a fiery, moving caterpillar, and, at a stroke, the last stars were washed away, dissolving in blueness and infinite distance, the sun was peeping across the water and then sud-

denly, as though he had taken a leap elbow-high and elbow resting on the sea-line, he leaned forward and struck the world in the face with his great golden hand.

Had you been watching Gaspard, as he stood with the dawn wind blowing his hair, you would have seen the stroke of the sun's hand on his face, on the palms behind him, on the sea before him, suddenly given as a blow.

The same hand was striking the Bahamas, and in a hundred blue harbours from Cape Sable to Port of Spain ships' topmasts were catching the light. Martinique, Guadeloupe, Grenada, peak, morne, and valley, were already flaming to it like green torches in the dawn wind. Key West would be stricken in a moment and the gulf to Galveston and Tampico be turned from a lake of stars to a living sapphire, the Caribbean would leap alive from Grand Cayman to Darien, from San Juan to La Guaira, alive and burning and blue. The wind that was blowing in Gaspard's face, a wind that came over the blue and laughter of the morning sea like a wind from the golden age and the youth of the world, held freshness for the orange groves and the gardens of all these Western islands where the night jessamines were closing, the night insects ceasing their songs, and the fireflies preparing to put out their lamps.

Gaspard knew nothing of that tremendous poem in colour which the dawn shows to God each time she lifts the darkness from the tropics; just now he did not even see the sunrise and its splendour, he had, for a moment, forgotten even his fears; his eyes were fixed on an object about a mile away to the southeast, something round and black that bobbed in the sparkle and glitter of the water.

It was like the head of a swimmer, and now it was like a drifting buoy. It was drawing nearer, the current was setting it towards the island, and now—it was like a boat.

It was a boat!

There could be no mistake; it underwent alterations of shape as it twisted to the slap of the waves, now head on for the island, now nearly broadside on.

A boat—release from the islet and its dreams and terrors! The cry that escaped from Gaspard seemed echoed by the gulls.

He made for the pier of coral reef, running along the sand to it, forgetful of everything, never glancing at the place where the footsteps of Yves had been, scrambling over the coral till he reached the extreme end, where, surrounded by the morning sea, and the wind, and the light, he shaded his eyes and watched.

The boat was now plainly in view dancing on the waves with the lightness of a walnut shell on the ripple of a pond. It was empty and drifting towards the islet, but it would not touch the beach, it would pass by a few hundred yards; he saw that, and he prepared for the event by casting off his clothes.

It seemed a small boat midway between a dinghy and a ship's quarter-boat, and never to Gaspard's eyes had anything appeared so gay in motion or so friendly as this tiny craft dancing upon the waves.

At a distance it had seemed black, but now he saw that it was painted white; it was clinker built, for, so clear was the air, he could see the overlapping planks, and now as he stood preparing to take to the water and swim to it, the terror of the islet which he had shaken off for a moment came behind him again, and at once held him back and urged him forward.

What if the Terror followed him into the sea? Behind him there seemed a deadly enemy filled with wrath at his attempt to escape, and, for a moment, the want of power

that comes to us in nightmare held him shivering in the wind, the next he was in the sea, striking out for the boat.

He had to swim against the current that was carrying it, the waves hit him in the face like wet hands trying to drive him back; but the shock of the plunge had given him his courage.

The boat was close now, beautiful and buoyant, and white as a gull, smacking the sea as she came, shining with spray, the green water under her showing clear as an emerald. Now, she was only an arm's length away, and now, he was grasping the starboard thwart. She heeled over slightly as he got his elbow on the thwart and peeped in. She was empty of everything but the bottom boards and a pair of sculls, clean scoured with spray; a dead flying-fish was lying washing about in the few inches of water she had shipped; it was newly dead and had struck her only perhaps an hour ago.

He worked his way round to the stern, boarded her and stood upright.

He was free of the island at last, but he would have to land to get his clothes and some provisions and water.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE ESCAPE

HE stood for a moment balancing himself, his eyes sweeping the sky-line to southward, which shewed neither sail nor stain of smoke, and as he stood he heard the island calling to him.

"Hi! Hi! Hi! you there in the boat! come back! come back! Hi! Think you to escape us? Ha! ha!—hi! Fishing, wheeling, calling, O the weariness, the blueness, the waves, the wind, the sun; they are ours and they are yours. forever—forever—forever. Hi!"

Through the voices of the gulls came the monotonous tune of the beach across the bright morning sea. The tent flap had got loose again and was beckoning. Come what might, provisions and water must be taken on board and the clothes he had left on the reef spar recovered.

He felt like a man who had just escaped from a haunted house, yet he had to go back. To land again on that terrible spot and leave the boat whilst he hunted for the things was an act requiring real courage, but it had to be done.

He got the sculls out and, rowing towards the strand, beached the boat cleverly. There was no danger in leaving her, as the tide was ebbing; the only danger was in delay, for if the water receded too far, he would not be able to get her afloat again till high tide.

Jumping out knee-deep, he hauled her nose a little higher on the sand, then, running like a man pursued, he



made for the tent, seized the belt and the pouch of money, made for the heap of provisions, seized a bag of biscuits and some tinned stuff, and with his arms filled returned to the boat.

It was a nightmare business, for the vague fears of yesterday had become more definite, as though the near chance of escape had given them life. He felt Yves behind him as he ran, sweating as he ran, from the boat to the store of provisions and back to the boat. An empty water-breaker from the *Rhone* lay near the tent. This had to be filled; the spring was amidst the bushes, yet he made his way there, crushing the brushwood under his naked feet, his breath coming in bursts, his lips dry as sandstone. Yves had not caught him yet, as, the breaker on his shoulder, he came running back to the boat. He flung it in; the clothes, now, had to be fetched, the worst part of the business, for it was fifty yards down the beach to the ridge of reef and the clothes were at the extremity of the reef. But it had to be done, and he ran, sweating yet shivering, worked up to the wildest pitch of excitement, by the sea edge to the shore end of the reef.

He was without his boots,—he had forgotten that,—and the reef was sharp and rough; there were edges like knives that had to be avoided, drive Fear as she might. This was the place where Yves had first stood behind him in imagination, and it was here, now, that the pursuing terror was most acute.

At last, bleeding, panting, with shaking hands, he reached the clothes. He put on the boots and with the coat, shirt, and trousers under his left arm, came back swiftly along the reef, sprang on to the sand, and, running, shouting, gesticulating with his free arm, made for the boat.

He was shouting at the boat; she was there safe enough and in full sight; yet viewless hands seemed preparing to push her off; she would be gone before he reached her, the island would never let him escape.

When he reached her he brought his open hand bang down on the gunwale as if to make sure she was really there, flung in the clothes and then tried to push her off.

The tide had ebbed more quickly than he had imagined. She was firm on the sand. It was a two men's business to float her and he never would have done it, had he been alone; but he was not alone. Fear was with him.

The boat gave to his efforts, shifting slightly, then more and more, till she moved stem and stern to the lifting waves and was afloat.

He tumbled into her and she came broadside on to the strand; but the waves were less than two feet high and with one of the sculls he managed to pole her out, then, seizing both sculls, he rowed.

He was free of the island at last; sculls and current were sweeping him from it into the wastes of the blue sea; the water, all merry with the breeze, smacked the boat cheerily and flashed away and away, in the level sunlight to where the palms were waving, and the foam was breaking, and the sea-gulls calling.

"Come back!—come back!—you are leaving us, but our voices are following you. Go far as you may, our voices will follow you, our weariness, the sunlight, the blueness shall be yours forever—you there in the boat alone, where is Yves—Yves—Yves?"

Then, more far away, the last word, the last echo from the island,

"Yves—Yves—Yves."

Now, there was nothing but the passing of the wind, the sound of the sculls, and the warbling of the water. There were no waves here, the shallows and the reefs had made the sea choppy close to the island; here there was nothing but a heave of the sea, long lapses of swell, infinitely blue, breeze-strewn and sun-dazzled.

## CHAPTER IX

### A STAR ON THE SEA

THE island had passed away, painted out by distance; the sky above the horizon, paled by the indigo of the sea, lay like a ring of sparkling emerald; to southward, where the emerald passed into the living burning sapphire of the sky, lay a line of white clouds, swan-white and like a flock of flying swans, darkening with their suggestion of snow the blueness of the water, deepening with their remoteness the distance.

The warm wind blew steadily sparkling up the blue, the incredible blue of the sea; the scull-blades, immersed half a foot in the water, were tinted with azure, the floating scraps of seaweed were tinted with indigo; a man floating a yard deep would have shewn like a form of lazulite.

Gaspard had drawn in his sculls; free of the island now, what use was there in rowing? He had no idea of direction, North, South, East or West. His only chance, so he told himself, lay in his sighting a ship. He was in the hands of chance and he did not feel afraid. Not only that, but he felt in his mind a certainty that before long he would be rescued.

The relief of his escape from the island may have had something to do with this intuitive optimism, and the fact that he had provisions and water enough to last him for days. Loneliness had vanished; he had left her behind on the island, she and Yves.

It seemed like a bad dream, all that, and Yves was the worst part of it. He felt neither sorrow nor compunction for what had happened. Why should he? He had not meant to kill, and if he had meant to kill, would he not have been justified? He felt nothing of remorse, nothing of that pity for the dead man which had come to him yesterday, when, standing by the reefs on the eastward of the island, he had looked at the heap of raffle he had salvaged. He had suffered too much since then to have any sentimental feelings on the matter. Haunted and bedevilled, he had escaped with his reason more by luck than anything else.

He dressed himself and then he sat, rocked by the swell, drifting, the sun rising higher towards the zenith, the wind blowing steadily out of the southeast, warm as a woman's breath. Every now and then a flying-fish like a silver arrowhead would leave the sea, flash through the air, and vanish.

Towards noon a shoal of them chased by some enemy broke the water to starboard; one passed right over the boat, soundless in flight, swift, brilliant against the blue, with staring sightless eyes; a phantom from the deep pursued by a phantom, definite for a moment and hard to the sight as a jewel, gone like a ghost the moment after, made one again with the blue sea.

The wind tempered the heat of the sun, long strips of seaweed floated past lazily, and a turtle that had been sunning itself basking on the water's surface, slipped away and vanished as the boat drew near. A great gull came along drifting on the wind, passed with the silence of a moving cloud and dwindled to nothingness in the blue to northward.

Nothing in the world of water and sky seemed to move

with effort, a profound languor filled it all from the depths below to the heights above, from the little boat whispering and chuckling on the ripples to the distances of the horizon; distances that shewed nothing, told of nothing but summer, vagueness, and azure.

Two hours before sunset Gaspard standing up to get a better horizon and shading his eyes with his hand saw, away on the eastern sea line, a bright point burning like a star.

## CHAPTER X

### LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

It was a sail.

He stood with his eyes still shaded, motionless but for the movement of the boat.

From away out there a hand seemed to have reached clutching at his heart. The star so steadfast and so still held him by its very stillness and steadfastness. There, where the sunlight showed that motionless point of light were crowded decks, bending spars, snoring sails, life, motion; a ship breasting her way through the blue sea, heeling to the breeze.

All that was there. Here, nothing but a star marking poignantly the vacancy of illimitable distance. The wind had freshened, it was as though the ship had sent the joyous breath of life before her, the breezed-up water smacked the boat merrily, and even as he looked the star grew, lifting steadily as the mainsails joined the topsails above the sea line.

As Gaspard watched, his confidence and assurance left him. The blind trust in chance that had possessed him all day vanished now that chance had shewn her hand.

At once and vividly his true position stood before him, and the horrible chances of death that lay in it, and, so strange a thing is mind, now and for the first time did the sense of his own wealth in the possession of these twenty-one big pieces of gold take possession of him. Side by side

with the fear of not being rescued stood the vision of the possibilities that lay in them. Each one weighed as much as three twenty-franc pieces. Six hundred and three francs; with that what might he not do! It was the only big bit of luck that had ever fallen in his way, and it would be doubly bitter to die with his luck in his hands.

And, still, as he watched, the sail grew. The vessel was not nearly so far off as she appeared, for the boat gave a low horizon. For this reason, too, she seemed bigger than she really was. That she was heading straight for the boat he could not doubt, yet he stood torn by the fear that she would miss him, pass him by, not sight him.

His imaginative mind saw her passing, saw her fading away, saw himself standing and calling after her and cursing her; so vivid was the obsession that for a moment, as he drew the picture, blazing wrath shot up in his heart towards her captain, curses rose to his lips, and sweat started on his brow.

Then he wiped his face with his coat sleeve, and unable to remain in idleness a moment longer, took the sculls and headed the boat for the point from which the vessel was approaching.

Useless, the moment his back was turned on the sail it was gone from his mind as from his sight. He had to keep it in view and shifting his position with the sculls half drawn in, he sat watching.

He had not so good an horizon sitting as standing, yet the sail had sensibly increased in size even allowing for the altered elevation.

With a dip of the sculls he kept the boat so that he was always facing the approaching vision, and sitting thus the picture before him resolved itself into three components: the after part of the boat, white, clean-scoured by spray,



and burning in the sun with the exception of the space covered by his shadow; the blue of sea and sky; the ship.

Seated, with the sculls ready to correct the boat when she twisted to the wind and the current, his eyes passed from the boat to the far-off ship, from the ship to the sea and sky.

And still she grew, as a child grows in the womb, as an idea in the mind, adding member to member, significance to significance. He could see now the fore topsail distinct from the fore course. She was a square rigged vessel as to the fore part, but coming as she was, the spread of fore and topsails screened her rig.

She had altered, too, in colour; the frost white star was now a truncated pyramid of pale but brilliant rose, around which the deep blue heart of the sky paled to emerald by contrast.

And still she grew, motionless, or seeming not to move, yet becoming more definite, expanding as a bud expands, voiceless, and like a vision developing in a dream.

Moment joined itself to moment, minute to minute. She might now be ten miles away, or maybe more, her course would bring her directly to the boat and she would sight it to a certainty *if she had light*.

It was his own shadow cast by the oblique rays of the sun on seat and bottom board and thwart that suggested the chilling clause.

The sun was little more than an hour from his setting; would he cut the sea line before the vessel sighted the boat?

It was a race between the sun and the ship. He knew quite well that though she was coming apparently dead on to him, the chances were that she might pass him by a considerable distance, and, as though the thought had cast a blight on her, for a long time she hung, not seeming to

alter in size. Then magically, she took distinctness, mystery and beauty left her; in a short half hour she became clearly defined, a small vessel of perhaps two hundred tons, at a distance of perhaps five miles. She would not be doing more than eight or nine knots.

Gaspard looked behind him at the sun. It had outraced the ship, there were still diameters between it and the horizon, but the western blue was just beginning to turn, to tinge with vague orange, as though an impalpable mist of gold dust were rising from the sea.

But now the ship, as a runner strains when near the goal, seemed straining to reach him. Moment by moment she leapt nearer, and the old stained sails that had lost the vague rose of distance caught now the first touch of gold from the sunset.

The eastern sky still held its blue, and against it the ship burned like a ship of gold, and before her prow the water divided like glittering silk cut by a golden sword.

Scarcely a mile away she leapt more triumphantly into life, she seemed within hail; standing up and stripping off his coat Gaspard waved it, shouting against the wind, delirious, forgetful of distance, forgetful of the sun and then—just as though a bad wizard had touched her she began to lose her brilliancy; she had seemed springing towards him with golden arms outspread, triumphant, and seeking to save him and then, just as though indifference had suddenly seized her, she seemed to lose her speed.

He turned his head. God! the sun was gone, just a trace of fire lingered beneath the gold of the sunset, through which, like a dark blue wind, was stealing the night.

\* \* \* \* \*

The vessel from a ship had turned to a phantom lost in a world of violent shadow. With the passing of the sun

the breeze fell away to a gentle breathing of air. Then, in that moment of darkness and indecision, before the stars have taken full possession of the sky, standing up and straining his eyes he could not see the ship at all.

Ah! here she came at last, stealing along in the starlight with sails just filling and, then, more clearly to view as ten million stars lit the sea, turning it to frosted silver.

At four knots without a light showing, softly and seeming the very embodiment of treachery and evasion she came. She would pass by some five cable lengths to starboard and Gaspard, seizing the sculls turned the boat's head to cut her off.

As he rowed he shouted, and had anyone on board heard him they might have fancied it, so thin and hard was his voice, the crying of a sea gull, but from all appearances no one heard him, for not a light shewed.

Now she bulked up enormous, a great trapezium of ebony cutting the silver sky; he ceased rowing, shouted again, and paused to listen. So close was she that he could hear the wash of the water at her fore foot, the creaking of blocks and the slatting of the scarcely filled sails.

Scarcely a cable length away and making to pass him by half that distance she came, black as ebony, a barquentine, silent as a phantom, stealthy as a thief. Then, as he hailed her again with a last despairing cry, she burst into voice.

## CHAPTER XI

### CAPTAIN SAGESSE

A LANTERN shot its light over the port quarter, a voice hailed him from the deck:

"Hi yi ow!" shrill as a bird, and at the cry, like a shaken beehive, the forecastle broke into life; the decks in a moment were a-swarm, chattering like a tree full of monkeys, another lantern shewed over the port bow, and above the lantern a face black as the face of a devil with glittering eyeballs and white teeth grinned down on the boat below.

Next moment something struck Gaspard across the chest, it was a rope; seizing it he held on, and the little boat came up grinding against the great washing wall of the vessel, carried with her on her slow way and right beneath the broad channel of the foremast. He seized the rope's end to the forward seat, caught up the belt with the pouch of gold and fastened it to his waist; then, reaching up, he caught hold of a channelplate and with the help of another rope flung by the chattering crowd above, swung himself on to the channel. Next moment he was on deck.

The starlight lit the decks dimly fore and aft, he was surrounded with negroes swarming and chattering like monkeys; a man in a panama hat who had helped him over the side, and who, disregarding him, was now shouting directions in shrill French to a black man who had slipped down into the boat, seemed the only white man on board.

Having finished his directions he turned, kicked a negro who stood in his way, caught up a lantern, and coming up to Gaspard held the light to him as if he were a work of art he wished to examine.

"French?" said the man in the panama, speaking in that language and fixing Gaspard with a pair of beady unwinking black eyes. His face lit up by the lantern-light was round, good-tempered looking, the face of a *bon bourgeois*—yet the eyes chilled Gaspard for a moment ere he replied:

"Yes, Frénch, shipwrecked and floating about in that cursed boat till you nearly ran me down."

"What ship?"

"The *Rhone* of the *Compagnie Transatlantique*."

"The *Rhone*; I have seen her in Havana harbour, is she lost then?"

"Yes, ripped her bottom out on a reef and gone with all on board."

"You are the only one saved?"

"Yes."

"*Boufre!*" said the other, betraying his *provenance* in the word. "A Moco, too, so was I till I became a man of my own. Well I have saved you, and *I take the boat!* I am Captain Sagesse, and this is my barque *La Belle Arlésienne*."

He seized Gaspard by the coat lapel as he brought the words out with emphasis.

"The boat is mine, you understand."

"Oh the boat, she is yours and welcome."

"She is worth five hundred francs, and a brush full of white paint will take the *Rhone's* name off her. I found you on a raft—no, on a hencoop—no, on a spar—" he slipped his arm through Gaspard's and was leading him aft to the deck-house on the poop. "You were floating on a spar."

Here is the deck-house. Come in." He opened the deck-house door disclosing a cabin comfortably, yet roughly furnished. A table stood in the middle, over the table hung a swinging lamp. Two doors opening aft gave entrance to the captain and mate's cabins, tiny holes not much bigger than dog-kennels. The captain flung his panama on the table and Gaspard took a seat, and looked at his companion who was now opening a locker, and fetching out a bottle of rum and some glasses and a basket of ship biscuits. This roundfaced and contented looking personage had, in the first moment of their acquaintance, invented and asked him to assist in a microscopic felony. He placed his hand on the bag of gold at his side as, leaning on the table, he replied:

"But, see here, that boat doesn't belong to the *Rhone* at all."

The man in the panama had placed the things on the table, he turned.

"But you said—"

"Yes, but you have not heard all; I was wrecked from the *Rhone* right enough, on a spar too, away on an island down there, then the boat came floating along, she has no name on her that I have seen, I got into her and rowed away—that's all."

"*Outre*," said Sagesse, pouring out two glasses of rum, whilst Gaspard took a biscuit. The little man almost seemed disappointed; one might have fancied that he regretted the lost chance of "doing" the *Compagnie Transatlantique* out of a boat, then he took a Martinique cigar from his pocket, lit it, and with his elbows on the table began to talk and ask questions.

He asked questions without waiting for an answer, nay, he sometimes answered them himself, as—

"The *Rhone*, I have seen her in Havana harbour, what tonnage was she? Oh, I know, seven thousand; she and the *Roxelane* were sister ships. The *Roxelane* called regularly at St. Pierre. Oh, yes, I ought to know her, Martinique bred as I am. Not born, mind you. No, I was born at Arles, but I have spent thirty years in these seas. One can make money in these seas, but one never can forget the old land, and you were born at Montpellier, you say, 'tis the same thing, and all Provençals are brothers. Think you, if I picked up a Dutchlander or an English, or even a Ponantaise, I would be giving him rum in my cabin—" Then mellowed by the rum and the presence of another Provençal, he leaned his elbows further on the table and continued talking and asking questions without seeming to hear the answer.

## CHAPTER XII

### RUM

HE had done big things, had Captain Sagesse, since the day thirty years and more ago when, deserting from a French ship, he had taken up his abode at St. Pierre. Beginning at the very bottom, he had worked his way up to comparative affluence, and whilst plying Gaspard with questions he interpolated fragments of his own history. Captain Sagesse was the only subject of very deep interest to Captain Sagesse; had he been going to his own execution he would have cast fragments of his history to the crowd, he was a walking autobiography, and he had been closed for three weeks, inasmuch as the crew consisting entirely of blacks, he had no one to open himself to. He told of how he worked the vessel entirely with blacks, Barbadians, and when he had exhausted his slight interest in Gaspard and his history he returned to himself, talking as though Gaspard were an old friend just stepped aboard, the freemasonry of the south and a common birthplace giving him the familiarity of long acquaintanceship. There was scarcely a disreputable transaction in which a ship's keel could find a place but it seemed that Captain Sagesse and his barque, the *Belle Arlésienne*, had been in it—gun running in the Spanish-American war, smuggling, and worse. He owned the vessel, he owned property in Martinique and very questionable property in St. Pierre; and inspired now by rum and what seemed at first blush a charming and



natural naïveté, he told about himself and his doings, his possessions and aspirations with characteristic force and freedom.

Gaspard, at first half drowsy with weariness, listened like a person in a dream to the chatter of the other, then, the rum beginning to take effect upon him, he found himself laughing at things which might have made him frown if listened to in strict sobriety. He was sinner enough, but in his small way in life he had dealt straightly with his fellows, he had, at all events, no feeling for a scoundrel, and Captain Sagesse was scoundrel enough, heaven knows, to judge by his conversation. He had got the better of governments, men, and women; he gave neither names nor dates nor places, talking in his loose way with nothing more definite than, "It was an islet, it might have been fifty miles south or fifty miles north of Rum Cay—but that doesn't matter," or "Honorine, that might have been her name, but it wasn't, anyhow, I'll tell you the trick she served Pierre Sagesse, and then I'll tell you the trick he served her."

All at once the brain of Gaspard, drowsed by the events of the day, cleared, perception became acute, sensation beatified, two glasses of strong rum and the Martinique *bout* which the Captain had given him, had opened for him the door of the Brandy Paradise; the deck-house of *La Belle Arlésienne* seemed palatial, Sagesse the greatest of men and he, Gaspard Cadillac, the equal of Sagesse.

He held out his glass for more rum.

"And mark you," said Sagesse as he poured it out, "I got my hold on her in that way, because, *mordieu*, I remembered those two words she said that night to the mate of the *Bayonnaise*. They thought I was drunk, but I have never been drunk in my life, and I never forget."

"Nor I," said Gaspard, "never been drunk and never forget." The recollection of Anisette and Yves came up in his mind, and he thumped the table with his fist. "I have served my man out. No, I never forget. Now you listen—" But Sagesse was off on another tack, money business this time, and Gaspard rocking unsteadily in his seat with his eyes injected, the cigar in the corner of his mouth, and his fists clenched on the table before him, sat hearing nothing, glorified in the hideous upset of alcohol, filled with the splendour of his own importance, and tormented on his throne by something, he knew not what; but which took the form of Yves.

It was the woman of Marseilles still working like a demon at his heart and brought into full life by the drink. The feeling that another man had done him out. That another man had been preferred to him. That another man was a better animal, even though that man was dead. Alcohol told him that he was glorious, supreme, a man amongst men. Anisette like a pale, sneering ghost said "Pshaw. Where is Yves. You, you are nothing to a woman."

"And it was worth seven thousand dollars American gold coin," Sagesse was saying in the course of his yarn, when Gaspard, whipping the belt and pouch from his waist, brought them down on the table with a bang, so that the gold coins rolled out.

"Look at that," cried Gaspard. "What you say? Wasn't that worth the thrust of a knife?" The coins danced before him as he sat rocking in his seat, an abstemious man as a rule, the weariness and the strong old rum had done their work.

Sagesse stopped short in his story, stared at the belt and the gold and then at the man before him. Sagesse, though

he chattered of his own doings, never by any chance gave a man a handle to use against him; his tales were as vague, all save the villainy of them, as clouds; his one weakness was talking and he knew it and guarded against it, the villainies he boasted of were all apocryphal; based they were on black deeds, just as clouds are based on mountains, the scoundrel in him had to boast, but to bring Sagesse to book on one of his stories would be like attempting to bring a bird to earth by grasping at its shadow on the ground.

Men had tried to blackmail this *raconteur* on the strength of his statements; to bring the vulture to earth by catching at his shadow, only to find themselves in the vulture's clutch, blackmailed themselves most cruelly. And he never let go as long as his clutch held, and there was a feather on the victim. But though he chattered fables, he knew when to be silent in face of facts. He was silent now. He laughed but said nothing for a moment, whilst Gaspard gathering the coins together in a heap, reiterated his question.

"What you say—isn't that worth the thrust of a knife?—given in fair fight, mind you, man to man, and the better man wins." Sagesse held out his hand, took a coin, examined it and handed it back.

"*Bon Dieu*, yes. So you killed him—but where did he get these things from, they are not coins of to-day. Had he, then, been robbing a museum?"

Gaspard nodded with drunken gravity.

"That's it, you've hit it, he robbed someone of them and wouldn't share, it was over there on the island."

"Aha," said Sagesse. "So you killed him on the island, *ve*, but you are a man after my own heart, the island—and the name of your man you said was—"

"Yves."

Gaspard exhausted, falling into the third stage of intoxication, was leaning now over the table, his eyelids drooping, the cigar end, no longer alight, held loosely in his nerveless fingers.

"Yves—and what rating was he?"

"Stoker."

"So—but he had another name, he was not only called Yves?"

"What you say?" asked Gaspard, rousing slightly.

Sagesse repeated his question, but the man at the table did not seem to comprehend, then, stricken with sleep he sank completely forward, his head resting right cheek down on the table, his right hand on the pouch containing the money. Sagesse looked at him for a moment contemplatively, then he went to the door and cried, "Jules." A shuffling sound came along the deck, and a big negro, barefooted and bare-breasted, with his wool all tied up in little knots, made his appearance at the door.

Sagesse pointed to the man at the table, and Jules with a broad grin but without a word, entered and took the dreamer by the shoulders, Sagesse took him by the feet, and between them they carried him to the starboard dog hole, which did duty for a mate's cabin when a mate was on board. Here they put him in the bunk, Sagesse placed the belt and pouch of money in the bunk beside him, then they closed the door on him and left him to his slumbers.

When Sagesse found himself alone, he took a chart from a locker, spread it on the table and pored over it.

Gaspard had told him that he had only been drifting since morning. If this were so, if the man were not lying, and if, indeed, he had left an island that morning, then the only island he possibly could have left was here marked on

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the chart, a tiny island reef beset to North, South, and East; eighty miles or so southeast of Turks Island.

Sagesse knew the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic that includes the Bahamas as well, almost, as he knew the heart of the lower order of mankind. He knew from his own knowledge, and leaving the chart aside, that there was only one islet about here from which a boat could drift or be rowed in the course of a day to the point where he had picked up his new acquaintance. He knew the island by sight, too, the clump of seven palm trees, the white sandy beach, and the murderous reefs. He had seen it through the glass several times, in past years. He had counted the palms, seven of them. He never forgot anything; that was partly why from a foremast hand in the French mercantile marine, he had risen to wealth and eminence of a sort. He fetched a pen and inkhorn from the locker, and made just over the islet the form of a tiny cross, then he put the chart, pen and ink back in their places and came on deck.

The moon had risen, still a crescent but strong enough to flood the sea with light. Jules had relieved the man at the wheel, and stood a dusky ghost before the yellow binnacle light, the wind still held and had even strengthened a little, and in the silence of the night the click of the rudder chain, the wash of the water at the bow, and the occasional groan of hemp-rope and block could be heard.

The barquentine seemed talking to herself in an undertone. Old and weary of the sea, dressed in canvas, patched and stained and ill-fitting, barnacled and streaming southern weeds from her copper, she went her way across the moonlit water, steering now, to make the passage between Haiti and Porto Rico; a hag of the ocean groping her way from port to port, now on honest business, now on contraband, from Yucatan to Port of Spain.

## CHAPTER XIII

### LA BELLE ARLÉSIENNE

At about six o'clock the next morning Gaspard awoke from sleep, half stifled by the close air of the little cabin where Sagesse had placed him. The taste of the rum was still in his mouth, and at a stroke, and almost at the return of consciousness, the doings of the past night rose before him—up to a certain point. He remembered the conversation of Sagesse, he remembered taking the belt from his waist and flinging it and the pouch of money on the table, but beyond that point he remembered nothing.

He put his hand to his waist, belt and bag were gone. He put his legs out of the bunk, and was just in the act of getting on his feet when his hand rested on something hard, it was the pouch. It had not been tampered with, he could tell that by the feel, but, to make sure, he opened it and counted the gold pieces by the dim light which shone through the scuttle overhead.

Yes, the twenty-one pieces of gold were there, solid, bright and hard. He put the belt round his waist and buttoning his coat over the pouch came on deck.

*La Belle Arlésienne*, close hauled under all sail, was making a full eight knots steering S. S. E. with the coast of Haiti a line on the southern horizon. She had altered her course in the night and she lay now with the shoals and reefs south of Turks Island on her port quarter, but nothing of them shewed. for the sea over that way under

the newborn sun lay like a blazing gem, a sheet of corrugated crystal, each of whose million, million facets was a mirror; then, round from there to where the bowsprit was poking at the sky above the sea line went the sea, without sail or sign of life deepening in blueness to where the far-off Haitian coast lay hyacinth coloured in the morning.

Gaspard looked around him, he could see no sign of Sagesse; a negro dressed in a pair of canvas trousers held by a single suspender, stood at the wheel, several more were grouped round the fo'c'sle-head engaged on some business, and a thin streak of smoke from the caboose told of breakfast in progress.

From where he stood the deck stretched away unencumbered by cargo, and barred by the shadows of the standing rigging; they had taken the boat on board, and she was lying bottom up on the deck forward of the mainmast.

Despite her age, despite the decks so yellow stained by time that plank and dowel were of the same colour and indistinguishable, despite the sails all cut and patched, the old barquentine had still a look of buoyancy and life caught from the brave morning light and the flooding azure of sea and sky.

The smell of tar and bilge and rope, the groan of rubber and creak of mast brought up for Gaspard the vision of the *Tamalpais* and his early youth. No other sensation is at all like the feel of a sailing ship beneath one's feet. The steamer is a dead weight driven by an alien force, its progression is a continual insult to the wind and the sea, but the sailing ship is one with the sea and the wind, her motion is fluent, fresh, and part of the eternal movement of nature. As Gaspard stood with his eyes fixed on the distant Haitian coast, Sagesse came out of the deck-house and gave him good-morning.

The Captain had a telescope in his hand, and ranging himself beside Gaspard he began to examine the coast-line attentively through the glass.

Not a word did he say of the proceedings of the past night. He stood picking out the points and headlands of the coast, remarking on them now and then, and now and then throwing in some piece of reminiscence, as "Over there—you can just see that bluish spot, it goes in deep, the land there—that's where a big English ship went on the rocks. The *Severn* in the storm of '82. I helped in the salving. *Ma foi*, I have never seen such a big ship with her back so broken. She was opened out like a band-box. She was filled with millinery, too, New York fashions for Jamaica; the rocks were dressed in chiffon, it was like the wreck of the *Bon Marché*, and the negresses came down to help—you can fancy!" or "That point, you can just see it with the eye to eastward of the blue spot, over there they hanged the last of the pirates, Freemantle—"

"What does he know, what did I say last night. I remember flinging the money on the table, I remember saying something about Yves—but what? Did I say much, did I say little? And the money, he must have picked it up and put it in the pouch, and put the pouch and belt beside me as I lay in the bunk, hog that I was—*mordieu*—what did I say?" These thoughts were running through Gaspard's mind as he stood watching his companion and listening to his remarks almost without comprehending them.

But Sagesse, whatever he knew, shewed nothing of his knowledge. He chatted familiarly and easily, and when breakfast was brought aft by Jules they sat down to it, and over the steaming coffee and fried bacon and bananas, the Captain continued his easygoing discourse, chatting on



everything and nothing, but always with interest.

The blackguardly edge had gone off his conversation, it was only at night it appeared whetted by alcohol, for Sagesse was a methodical drinker, never glancing at the bottle till the absinthe hour.

Gaspard during the meal made an offer of work, but Sagesse would not hear of it.

"You are a brother Provençal, well, I have picked you up floating about on the sea and that's all about it, I have more than enough hands to work the ship, and your food, what does it cost? Besides, we can settle up at St. Pierre. St. Pierre, Martinique, yes that is my port. You have never been there? Ah, *mordieu*, then you have never seen life, you will see it at St. Pierre where men know how to laugh, and love is as cheap as bananas."

"Well, I will be able to pay you," said Gaspard, "that is to say if I ever can pay you for all you have done for me."

Sagesse laughed.

His face, ordinarily pleasant except for a certain fixity of the eyes, lost its pleasantness in some strange way when he laughed.

Clean shaved, except for a rather heavy and drooping moustache, fat and weather-tanned, in white cap and apron, save for his bronzing he would have made an ideal chef; a concocter of sauces and *entremets*, fat with the steam of his kitchen; but when he laughed he shewed his teeth and just that one touch destroyed his *bonhommie*, for his laughter did not extend above his mouth, and laughter is inhuman when the eyes do not correct the teeth.

All day they kept the Haitian coast on the distant horizon, the water had been blue off the island, but to Gaspard, as he hung over the side, it seemed that this water was

even bluer. It was; the Caribbean, that great lake of burning indigo, was sending its colour to meet them, the foam flakes from the fore-foot of the *Belle Arlésienne* swept past like marble shavings cast on slabs of lapis-lazuli, and violets would have seemed pale and faded held against the background of the sea to southward.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MONEY-CHANGER

GASPARD, though a man full-grown and a man, moreover, who had passed his life in touch with the brutal side of things, had still in his nature very much of the child. The Provençal rarely grows old, he withers at last in the sun and comes to die, but the child in him remains a child; imaginative, impulsive, easily moved to laughter or tears, good or naughty, with a passion for colour, and movement, and sound, and exaggeration. And so he remains a poet in his way.

Go all over the earth, and you will find man imitating the insect in this particular, that he is the colour of the leaf he was born on. Gaspard was the colour of Provence, and all the coal-dust of the stokehold, the sordidness of the life had not altered his essential colour; the something tragic, something gay, something vivacious, something lazy which is part of the southern land of black shadows, white roads, blue skies, keen mistral, and poignantly scented flowers still clung to his personality.

Even Sagesse shewed something of a trace of this in the exaggeration of his own doings, in his vivacity, and in the flower which he carried in his button-hole when ashore.

But there was little of the child about Sagesse and much of the master. As day followed day, and the working of the vessel shewed itself more and more to Gaspard, astonishment filled him at the extraordinary discipline amidst

the hands, and the way Sagesse worked them. When he was out of sight they would shout and chatter amongst themselves, but the instant he appeared silence took the deck as it takes a grove of chattering birds when a hawk appears in the sky overhead. Orders were executed at a run, yet he never swore or raised his voice louder than was necessary; occasionally when a man got in the way, as on the night of Gaspard's boarding the vessel, he would give him a kick just as a master might kick a dog, but beyond that his rule seemed kindly. They were all Barbadians, these blacks, and English-speaking, with the exception of Jules who was Haitian born, but Sagesse could talk to them fluently in their own language. He could talk four languages, French, Spanish, English, and Portuguese; he had picked the three foreign languages up as a means to trade, and it was to his mastery of them, as much as his own astuteness, that he owed his success in life.

One night, sultry and cloudless with the sea like frosted silver under the starlight and the warm breathing of the wind, Gaspard, going into the deck-house found Sagesse seated at the table before a chart.

"If this wind holds," said Sagesse, "we should sight Martinique at dawn." He spoke with his eyes upon the chart, then, looking up: "What do you propose to do when you get there?"

"Oh, as for me I don't know," said Gaspard taking a seat opposite the other. "Report myself to the *Compagnie Transatlantique*—draw what pay is owing to me, and try and get recompense for my kit."

"Well," said Sagesse, "if I were in your place, I would let all that slip."

"How?"

"*Ma foi*, how?—say nothing, or as little as you can, report yourself, but do not trouble about compensation."

"And why?"

Sagesse laughed. "Because, my friend, it is not well to stir muddy water; you get before one of these infernal clerks with a pen in his hand, and he takes notes of what you say, you ask for compensation and he says, 'Yes, yes, that is just, compensation, certainly, but first my friend, prove yourself to be whom you say you are, and give us your story in detail.' Then with the point of his pen he turns you inside out and," said Sagesse tapping on the table with his thumb, "it is not well to be turned inside out if one has anything to conceal."

"To conceal?"

"For instance," went on Sagesse, "the official of the *Compagnie Transatlantique* might say, 'Who was your engineer-in-chief, who was your second engineer, had you a chum, what was his name?'". Sagesse watching Gaspard narrowly saw the sweat start on his forehead, laughed, and finished, "and you would not say, 'His name is Yves, he escaped with me, we landed on an island, he had a belt about his waist and a pouch containing a number of valuable gold coins which he had stolen, and I killed him and took the money.' You would not say that, perhaps, with your tongue, but your face might give a hint, or your manner, and a hint might lead to a suspicion, and a suspicion to a search—you should have burned that body."

Gaspard, staring at the man before him, felt as though an ice-cold blade had been driven through his heart, his flesh crawled. He had told all, then, to this man, and more than all. He felt nothing of what the criminal feels whose crime has been discovered, for he felt himself innocent of crime or criminal intent. It was the horror of the fact that he had given himself away, and under the influence of drink had described the affair in such a manner

that Sagesse believed him a murderer—this it was that paralysed him for the moment.

For a moment only, then, thrusting his hands out as though he were putting something away from him, he burst out, "I did not kill him for money—it's a lie. If I said so I lied—it was an accident. True, we quarrelled about the money, but I did not kill him for it. The knife only scratched him and he dropped. I had saved his life; does a man murder another whose life he has saved? When I spoke, I was mad with your cursed drink. If I had murdered him would I have told of it? I did not kill him for money—do you believe me?"

"My friend," replied Sagesse quite unmoved, "I believe you. But you yourself admit the fact that you killed him."

"Yes, by accident."

"And took his money?"

"It did not belong to him. He had only just found it amidst the bushes, the belt and the pouch. Why do you shake your head, do you not believe me?"

"Whether I believe you or not, does it matter—? This man had found money, you killed him—by accident, with a knife, and took his money. Does your reason not tell you that such a tale is enough to hang the Archbishop of Paris—but it is all your affair, and as I said just now, my advice is to let the thing lie. Do not disturb dead bones. Let us forget it, and be practical. If I chose, I could hand you over to the authorities at Martinique to-morrow. I have marked on the chart the position where you boarded me, and the position of that island, which is the only one in that vicinity. But it would not be of the least profit to me to get you into trouble. Not in the least. I would much sooner help you. Well, to business. That money will be your worst friend, instead of your best if you try to use

it ashore as it is, you must change it for good American dollars. Put it on the table and I will change it for you."

"Before God," burst out Gaspard, "I will do nothing unless you believe me when I say that I came by it rightly, that there is no stain of blood on it, that what happened there on the island was an accident, and that I am no murderer!"

Sagesse, who knew man thoroughly, and who ever since the first morning of their acquaintance had been studying him minutely, rose to his feet and slapped his right hand down on the table palm uppermost.

"I believe you, there, the words are said and let us say no more on the matter—how far others would believe you, it is not for me to say, but there, let the matter end and come to business."

He sat down again, and Gaspard opening the pouch at his waist put the coins on the table in a heap.

Sagesse counted them. "*Dieu*," said he, holding one in his hand and examining it. "Fancy trying to change this lot at a banker's or *bureau de change*, they would be enough to raise a blister on the reputation of a saint. I can get rid of them, though; with difficulty it is true, but still I can get rid of them. But I don't take risks without a chance of good profits. I will give you forty dollars for the lot."

"Less than two dollars apiece?"

"Slightly."

"*Mordieu*," said Gaspard. "I would as soon throw them overboard."

Sagesse put both his elbows on the table and laughed. Then the haggling began. Gaspard, the son of a tradesman, had something of the business man in his nature. It was a strange picture, and not without its romantic side. The two southerners seated opposite to each other

at the table of the dingy deck-house, the swinging lamp overhead casting its light on the chart, the pieces of gold, and the strenuous faces of the barterers.

One might imagine that Sagesse, having the game, seemingly, in his hands, would have forced his terms on the other; but that would be without counting on the character of the Captain and the laws which governed his life. "Never appeal to social laws unless in the last extremity. Never use force against a man stronger than yourself. Take the pyx, but leave the priest the chalice (in other words—do not strip a man so bare that he will turn upon you in desperation)"—these were three of the laws governing this wise man's actions. He was an artist in scoundrelism, for he knew the value of restraint.

"Sixty dollars, then," said Sagesse, after they had been haggling for half an hour or more. "You agree, good, of course I will make my profit on them, but what would you have? I am a trader, *vé*—, and I will give you more than sixty dollars; I will give you advice."

"Yes?"

"Don't go back to the stokehold. With sixty dollars in Martinique you may start a little business. Go shares in a fishing boat, deal in fruit—you are young and active, and in Martinique sixty dollars are equal to six hundred at Havre or in Paris. I will shew you the ropes, as the English say. Do you know, monsieur, that I, Pierre Sagesse, have started by my advice and help a dozen people in Martinique who are now prospering?"

He had risen, and all the time he was talking he was searching in the locker where he kept his charts. At last he drew forth a little chamois bag and, opening it, shot out on the table the money it contained. The little bag held exactly sixty dollars in gold coin and some silver.



*"Ma foi*, the exact sum; that is odd and ought to be a sign of luck. There is your money, and I will not take the belt and pouch; you can keep them."

Gaspard pocketed the money. It was more than odd that the little chamois leather bag held the exact sum in question. He felt certain that Sagesse, days before, had worked out the problem of what he should pay for the coins, and had placed this sum in readiness.

The character of the man lay revealed in that act, as also in the way he had kept dumb about Yves till the moment of his purpose.

Gaspard felt certain that had it suited his interests Sagesse would have betrayed him to the authorities. He left the deck-house, and leaning against the starboard bulwarks, looked over the starlit sea.

Though he had left the island blue leagues behind, it still pursued him, and, in the form of Sagesse, still had a hold upon him, the island and the deed committed there.

He could see it still, just as he saw it when making his escape. The sun-stricken palms, the white beach, the white surf breaking on the beach, the white gulls—he could hear their voices calling to him.

"Hi, Hi, Hi! You there in the boat! come back! come back! Hi! think you to escape us? Ha! Ha! Hi! Fishing, wheeling! calling! O the weariness, the blueness, the waves, the wind, the sun. They are ours and they are yours forever—forever—forever. Hi!"

## CHAPTER XV

### THE MAGIC TOWN

HE was awakened next morning by the roar of the anchor-chain through the hawse-pipe.

Five minutes later he was on deck.

*La Belle Arlésienne*, steered by magic hands during the night, had raised some magic horizon and passed it to anchor in paradise. So it seemed to him as his eyes travelled from the cloud turban of Mont Pelée coloured by the dawn, and followed the tumbling woods, the cascades of leaping foliage high, far off, dark in shadow, falling to the hillside city; and the city breaking from the woods, falling street by street to the harbour's edge; palm-tops peeping above the red-tiled roofs; houses, shadows, palms; tracery of gardens, squares, step flights from street to street; old moss-grown flights of steps, old gardens and scraps of gardens giving shelter to the grenadilla and the fleur d'amour; old houses, heavy-built and lightly coloured, all stretching from the great high woods to the very edge of the shadowy harbour in whose depths the blue of night still lay.

The blue of night—though the sky above Pelée was ablaze with the morning blue. Over on the east of the island at Grande Anse the morning was already full and splendid, but here the shadow of peak and morn held everything in magical *chiara oscura*. The city, seen as though through a vague veil of gauze, seemed asleep, yet

it was burning with early morning life, and Gaspard, as he watched, could see the moving figures of people, forms trickling down the steep flights of steps leading from street to street, and swarming by the sea steps and harbour side.

Held, just for a moment, in this curious twilight lingering in the shadow of Pelée, whilst all the sea world beyond flashed to the sun-blaze of the tropics, the old sea-city of St. Pierre hanging, literally, between sky and sea, between dawn and night, between the present and the past, shewed to the mind those pictures of suggestion which lie in tapestry and verse.

Gaspard had never seen anything at all like this. He had seen many a tropic town where the galvanized tin roof of the trader, or the rigid outlines of the Methodist meeting house broke crudely through the beauty of palm-iste and orange. But St. Pierre lay before him beautiful, absolutely beautiful, like a dream city set in Wonderland.

Nothing could be more wonderful than those torrential woods far up above the houses, woods of balisier and palm, tamarind, ceiba, and giant fern; lianas cable thick, air shoots, all climbing in the twilight, and leading the eyes to the slopes of Pelée and the peak, cloud-wreathed and burning in the blue.

Nothing could be more strange or more poetical than the city reaching from these woods to the shadowy sea.

Other vessels were anchored in the harbour, boats were putting out from the shore; now, clear and sharp-cut, through the vague noises of early morning came the note of a bugle from the fort, and from a sailing-ship away to starboard the clank of capstan pawls and the cry of sailors hauling on the halyards.

With and through everything came the perfume of the land, earth and tropic flowers, jasmine and vanilla scents, mixed with the scent of the sea.

Gaspard turned from the city and looked westward. Beyond the shadow of the island the sea lay in the bright daylight, shewing beneath the emerald ring of the horizon the virginal blue of early morning.

As he turned, Sagesse left the deck-house and stood for a moment looking on the land before speaking to his companion.

"Better than the stokehold," said the Captain, who had put on a clean suit of white drill, and a shore-going and holiday manner; "better than the engine-room, *vé!* Look, the *canotiers* are putting off and the port officers will be aboard us before we have finished breakfast."

Jules appeared, as he spoke, from the caboose, bearing a steaming coffee-pot; they went into the deck-house for the meal, and before it was half through and, as if to bear out the truth of Sagesse's prediction, the port officers arrived.

They came into the deck-house, where Sagesse served them with vermouth and cigarettes; they seemed to know Sagesse as a friend, and bill of lading or bill of health seemed to trouble them very little as far as Gaspard could judge, who, in the middle of the cigarette smoking and exchange of news, left Sagesse to his friends and came on deck.

He found a new St. Pierre. Colour had stolen over the slopes of Pelée; light had stretched out her hand and torn away the veil of twilight. A burst of blue struck him in the face as he left the dingy deck-house. A sky of blue, a sea of blue, triumphant, crystalline, dazzling, and in the midst of this world of leaping lazulite, St. Pierre standing like a dreamer awakened by the sea.

Awakened from where the high woods were rocking and singing in the morning wind, to where the breeze-swept

harbour was lipping ship side and quay with the flash of sapphire satin.

One could see, so clear was the air, the tiles on the red-tiled roofs and the palm fronds bursting above them; a flag was flickering above some consulate, the palm-tops were dancing to the breeze that bore on its hot breath the scent of earth and trees and the sounds of the city that seemed less a city than a daring aquarelle, blindingly beautiful, triumphantly bright.

Round the *Belle Arlésienne* *canotiers* were paddling; banana-coloured children in little coffin-shaped canoes made out of old packing-cases, canned meat cases, anything in the form of a box that could be cut into the form of a canoe. They were chattering to the black sailors, and when they saw Gaspard they shouted to him to fling them coins to dive for, but before he could put his hand in his pocket Sagesse and the port officers left the deck-house.

The newcomers had offered to row Sagesse and Gaspard ashore, and the captain had evidently told them of the fate of the *Rhone*, for, as they crossed the harbour, Gaspard found himself an object of interest and plied with a hundred questions. At the sight of Sagesse the little *canotiers* had dispersed in every direction, and now, as they rowed, Gaspard could hear the thin voices of the children chanting a song; he caught the word "Sagesse" repeated over and over again, but the lisping *patois* and the breeze dimmed all else but the spirit of the ballad—Derision. Sagesse was not, evidently, a favorite with the *canotiers* of St Pierre, yet, to look at him seated by the port doctor, a cigar in his mouth and his thumbs stuck in his waist-belt, one might have fancied him a man to whom children would run by instinct.

He was in grand good humour this morning; so was

Gaspard; so, too, seemed the port officers. The joyous city seemed to radiate gaiety; the languor of midday had not yet fallen upon it and it laughed like a child awakened by a kiss on a bright morning.

The harbour-side was crowded; naked children, half-naked men, black men, banana-coloured men, apricot-coloured men, chattering in that French worn smooth which is the language of the French West Indies, a language in which *Monsieur* becomes *Missie*, *Maman*, *Manman*, and *France*, *Fouance*.

Amidst the 'longshoremen, the idlers, the *canotiers*, fishermen, and boatmen, strayed the forms of a few women, bright as tropic birds, graceful in striped foulards and jupes of exquisite colours, their wasp-yellow turbans striking the eye forcibly, the brightest points in a picture surcharged with colour and blinding light.

Sinbad never landed at a stranger port than this, so vividly real, so far removed from the commonplace, so filled with the presence of the past.

Romance sat on the very sea-steps, and as Gaspard landed he felt what every man who ever landed at St. Pierre must have felt vividly or vaguely—her touch.

Sagesse, bidding good-day to the port officers, struck uptown accompanied by Gaspard. Uptown, by flights of old steps, worn, moss-grown, shadowed by the black shadows of houses and roofed with a ribbon of blinding azure sky, everywhere the sound of running water from the thousand conduits and fountains, everywhere the sound of the sea echoing as in the whorl of a great shell.

The stepways led to streets, lines of blazing light and colour, verandahed, broken by black house shadows, filled with coloured people of all shades, all hues, from the muletresse to the chabine; all busy, moving, drifting,

chattering, buying or selling, finely formed, graceful as the palmistes.

Then more steps haunted by fountain and sea sounds, and they entered a river of light—the Rue Victor Hugo.

Gaspard, as he reached the street, looked back down the steep and twilight vico they had ascended, and saw the harbour, liquid shadow on which, seeming suspended in air, floated *La Belle Arlésienne*.

It was like a picture closing the first chapter of his life; the sea, and the island, and the ever-crying gulls, dead Yves, the stokehold, Marseilles, all lay there. Here was a new land and the beginning of a new existence. The sea, the island, the man he had slain—all beyond there. It all seemed remote, done with forever; yet it was close to him, potently alive in the form of Captain Sagesso, and able to stretch out a hand and touch him on the shoulder if so it chose.

## CHAPTER XVI

### RUE VICTOR HUGO

WHITE umbrellas, striped verandahs, black shadows, laughter, motion, colour, coloured people, coloured clothes, lemon-tinted houses, flower-blue sky, a street of light beneath a roof of azure, the Rue Victor Hugo lay before Gaspard.

Looking straight before one, the scene recalled Naples, Marseilles, Alexandria, with an extra touch as though a gleam, a perfume, a voice, had stolen from some vanished coloured city of the remote past; as though Pompeii had sent an idler, Carthage a trader, Tunis a coloured child, to lose themselves in the crowd and lend it, scarcely seen, a heart-catching subtlety.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is no sound of feet; everyone is shoeless; they walk in a whisper under the wonderful blue light of the sky, these people, these men and women of all shades of yellow, graceful, dignified, gracious, who might seem the inhabitants of a dream city but for the sounds of everyday life, cries of cigar vendors, and pastry vendors, and fruit sellers, children's voices, laughter; now comes from far away the music of a mirliton; it is playing in a street below—Pouf! up a steep side street comes the sound, louder, and carried on a breath of hot sea wind, and there below the blue face of the harbour laughs up at you so high above it. You pass on; the shops surround you



again, and the crowd and the voices; you reach a little square, a cube of colour; in its centre like a diamond flower forever in motion, the jet of a fountain plays in the sun, plays and sings to itself like the spirit of a happy child; and here where human voices are less loud you hear the sound of other fountains, the sound of rivulets, runnels racing by the side walks, pipes that empty into moss-grown channels all drawing their water from Mont Pelée, fatherly, and seated far above the great torrential woods, sky-throned, and turbaned with cloud.

You go on; the endless street bends and dips and rises again, never quite level; houses and blue bursts of sea alternating on the right, on the left, high above you, houses that break with their sun-stricken yellow the green foliage of the high woods. The torrent of yellow houses up above seems tumbling to the sea, or, if you like it better, the houses seem climbing to attack the woods. You can hear from up there wood sounds, the piping of the *siffleur de montagne*, the wash of moving foliage, just as you can hear from below the sounds of the sea, the songs of the fishermen, and the wash of the water on the beach.

As a curious and beautiful poem leads you to read on, so the coloured and sunlit street leads you to follow it; it brings you by a bridge across the Rivière Roxelane, where the washerwomen work from dawn till dark, and the boulders are snowed with linen, and so to the market-place, where the strangest things from sea and land are sold.

Beyond lie the mornes, green to the water's edge; the sea, the sky; great blue wastes of sun and silence.

\* \* \* \* \*

From a flower-seller as they entered the Rue Victor Hugo, Sagesse had bought a gaudy blossom which he put in his coat.

He was *en fête* and his good humour was infectious; linking his arm in that of Gaspard, he had led him into a café, a cool, spacious shop set out with marble-topped tables. On every table there was a little bowl filled with bright-coloured blossoms; men were seated about, men in cool white clothes and broad panama hats. As Gaspard followed his companion between the tables he noticed that all these men gave Sagesse good-day as though he were an old acquaintance, but without enthusiasm, and with a certain constraint.

Then, choosing a table in a corner, they sat down, and Sagesse beckoned to the bartender. He came running.

He had been piling some glasses on a tray and had not caught sight of the newcomers until just before Sagesse beckoned to him; instantly, and almost upsetting the tray in his haste, he came, and now he stood, a middle-aged quadron, mild-eyed, subdued-looking, standing before Sagesse as a slave might stand before his master.

"*Bonjour, Jules.*"

"*Bonjour, missie.*"

"How has trade been since I left?"

"Good, missie—Jules has been busy, very busy, for most a month—before that not so good." He spoke in the Creole *patois*, soft, fluent, a language that seems made for the lips of children.

Sagesse ordered drinks. When they were on the table he lit a cigar, handed Gaspard another, and then, crossing his legs and suddenly changing his manner:

"Let us talk business," said he.

"Business?"

"*Ma foi*, yes; that's what they call it—business. See here. I want the true story of the gold in that belt. I want to know more about that island, and I want to know something about that treasure-ship."

When you encounter a tropical centipede the thing that astonishes you most is the way in which it changes form, now effacing itself altogether in some coign of shadow, now drawn out, swollen, vicious, and ready to attack you, now shrunken, drawn together, a mere nothing that, next moment to a touch becomes distended and viciously alive.

The mind of Captain Sagesse seemed to possess this centipede attribute.

Gaspard had imagined the affair of the island done with; he had imagined that with the conclusion of the bargain over the gold pieces Sagesse had passed the matter behind him. He had said nothing about a treasure-ship. The ship of coral in the lagoon had been always present in his mind as a ship that might contain treasure, but he had said nothing about it. How, then, had Sagesse read his thoughts, and why had he not spoken of it before?

He stared at the Captain for a moment without speaking. "But that's all done with," said he at last. "I've told you my story; you've had your share in the stuff—Don't you believe me? And see here, what do you mean about a treasure ship? I never said a word about such a thing."

"My friend," said Sagesse, "between the captain and the mate's cabin on my vessel there is only a plank, and when the man sleeping in the mate's cabin shouts out in his sleep 'Hullo there, Yves, look, I can see through her hatch; she's full of gold; we'll fetch it out—share and share alike,' the captain sets himself to think. He says to himself, 'this man talks of a ship full of gold in his sleep; he came on board my ship from an island over there; he had in his possession a number of old coins, old Spanish pieces; he confesses in drink that he has killed Monsieur

Yves, the gentleman to whom in his dreams he talks of a ship full of treasure; well, don't you see?"

"What?"

"The conclusion—come, confess, you have a secret; give me the full story of that affair, or by my soul and on my honour I will call the authorities right in here and tell them a lot of things I know."

Sagesse, as he said the last words, changed completely, and in a moment, the *bon bourgeois* vanished, his upper lip raised slightly, disclosing the teeth. Just in that moment he shewed himself what he was, not a villain of romance, but that much more terrible individual, the petty trader, heartless, careful, calculating. The squid of society that, living on crabs and shell-fish, will, when opportunity offers, seize and devour a man.

What numbed the mind of Gaspard was not fear of the authorities, but fear of Sagesse and astonishment at his methods.

He felt as though in the grip of some gelatinous thing, this dusky mind had gripped him on board the *Belle Arlésienne* and had seemed to let him go; its tentacles had fallen from his arms, and now they were around his feet. It was useless to fight with Sagesse; he was at the man's mercy; betrayed by drink, he had put himself in the grasp of the cuttlefish.

"Look here," said he at last, "before I tell you anything, tell me this: Why did you not spring this on me before? Why did you trade with me for those coins? Why did you pretend to be my friend?"

"Why did I trade with you, *ma foi*? I traded with you because I wanted those coins at a fair price; I brought you here because I wanted to trade with you for

your secret at a fair price with the law at my elbow. I did not wish to conclude the bargain on board my own ship; it gives a ship a bad name when men are brought off her in chains by the police. I wanted no police on board *La Belle Arlésienne*. And as to pretending to be your friend, *ma foi*, I am your friend, and you shall have your share of the profits of your secret. But the truth I must have, come—"

"*Dieu!*" cried Gaspard with a burst of irritation. I was hiding nothing from you. There *was* a wreck on the island; I *did* think there was treasure on her, but I had put it from my mind. I talked of it in my sleep, did I? Well, it must have been there in my mind. You shall have the story."

Then, with his elbows on the table, he told how Yves had discovered the ship in the lagoon; he described her. Sagesse, also with his elbows on the table, listening intently, putting in a question now and then.

"That's all," finished Gaspard, "she may be up to the hatches with gold for all I know—and for the matter of that—for all I care."

Sagesse sat, now that the tale was told, musing in his chair, and pulling at his heavy moustache.

"And you were on that island," said he at last, "you saw that wreck, you found gold and the dead bones of a man, you fancied there might be more stuff there, yet, if I had not got the tale from you you would have said nothing to anyone about it; you would have perhaps gone back to the stokehold. Pah! I believe you, for that's the kind of thing that fills stokeholds with fools who are good for nothing but stoking—well, you will be fortunate despite yourself. I take the speculation up."

"You intend—"

"I intend to dynamite her open and see what she contains. When *La Belle Arlésienne* has discharged her cargo, I will put her in ballast, take some diving apparatus and what else is needful, and return to that island; you will go with me."

"I?"

"Yes, you; do you think I want the whole of St. Pierre in the business? I will take only my coloured crew; several of them are good divers, but I must have another white man on a job like this. You will have your share of the profits, fifteen per cent. That may be much, or it may be nothing, but you will have to work for it, for it will be horse work getting the stuff off her if she lies as you tell me. I take it she has been lying in that lagoon all of a hundred years; if she is a Spaniard there may be a lot of stuff—" Then, after a moment's pause, "There is stuff on that island; I smell it."

He fell into a moment's reverie, then, as if talking to himself, "the fellow those bones belonged to had something to do with her; he was one of her crew, or he was there hunting for treasure. He may have died of starvation or accident, or he may have discovered the stuff and been killed by his companions; if that was so they would not have left that belt and money behind them."

Gaspard sat watching Sagease; the man's mind seemed ferreting about the business like a hound; he seemed actually to smell money in the thing. Perhaps he did. There are men who in some uncanny way have the power of scenting fortune; their speculations rarely fail; they know what will appreciate in value, whether in land or stocks, and they will throw up the most likely venture just because their genius has discovered in it some hidden and fatal flaw unperceived by other men.

As Gaspard sat watching Sagesse a faint glow of enthusiasm began to warm his breast. What man is there to whom the thought of hidden treasure does not appeal? The idea of returning to the island would have been hateful to him half an hour ago, but already his heart was stirring to the venture.

He would not be alone.

Already he had divined the main points of Sagesse's character—or fancied he had—. He felt him to be cold-blooded, heartless, calculating, yet he fancied that if Sagesse offered him fifteen francs out of every hundred he made on the business he would keep his word. With such a small percentage in view it would be easier to keep his word than break it and make trouble. Sagesse came out of his reverie.

"Well," said he, relighting his cigar, which had gone out, "there's an end of the matter. I take the thing up; I put my money in it; I offer you your fifteen per cent.; I put you in the way, perhaps, of a small fortune. I make you, in fact, a small partner in what may be a big concern. Half an hour ago you were a Moco, and your end was the drinking bar and the stokehold; you had stuff in your head that was valuable to me and I had to blast it out of your skull by threats of the law, just as I will blast the stuff out of that hooker with dynamite. Well, what do you think of Pierre Sagesse? Is he a man who knows his way about? Is he a man worth following? I'm frank as day when I choose to be frank, and I tell you now, you may take the offer or leave it; come with me, well and good; refuse it, and I will get another man. Only, remember this, if you refuse you get nothing."

"What you offer is perhaps fair enough," said Gaspard,

"but this I will say, straight out, you treated me as a friend this morning; you took my arm, you brought me in here, you stood for drinks, and then you threatened me with that affair. I don't like that, and be you who you may, I say so."

Sagesse took a puff at his cigar and then patiently, as though explaining things to a child:

"You, this morning, were going about like a man with a jewel in his empty skull; I operated like a surgeon, and took it out; it was unpleasant, but there is the jewel, and instead of charging you a fee I offer you a percentage on the value. If I had not threatened, you would not have told. Well? What do you say?"

"I don't say I won't come—on one condition—that you never name that affair again or threaten me with it."

Sagesse laughed. "Threaten you, why should I? I have used the instrument, I fling it away. I have got all I want out of you, and now it is your turn to profit a bit. You will be very useful, and I don't want a stranger in the business."

"Look here," said Gaspard, true Provençal that he was, "fifteen per cent.—make it twenty—"

"Not a cent more than fifteen, not a cent, not a centime. I never go back on an offer of that sort."

"When do you start?"

"It will take me a week to clear the cargo and get ready; meanwhile you have your pocket full of dollars, and you can amuse yourself."

"I will come."

"Your word on that."

"I give you my word."

You will perhaps have divined that in the character of Gaspard, a character primitive enough, childlike in some



ways, and swayed by elemental passions, there lay a streak of straightness. To this man, who would not have known the meaning of "ethics," straight-dealing came as a natural gift. Sagesse had divined this fact and valued it, for, speaking generally, there is no man in the world who values honour in another more than your rogue.

"Come," said the Captain, rising from his seat. "I have business to do, and so have you. The *Compagnie Transatlantique* office is close here; go and report yourself; the port authorities will have you up before them too; you will most likely find their man at the shipping office, for I said you would be there, and, see here, you will want a suit or two of white drill; those clothes you have are too heavy for Martinique. Then you'll want a room; there are sailors' boarding-houses by the harbour, steer clear of them."

He took a little notebook from his pocket and wrote a name and address on a sheet of paper, tore it out and handed it to his companion.

"Go there. Manman Faly, Rue du Morne, No. 3. She'll put you up and find you a place. It's off the Grande Rue. You'll easily find it; come."

He turned to leave.

"We haven't paid for the drinks," said Gaspard, putting his hand in his pocket.

Sagesse laughed. "I never pay here; the place is mine; Jules there manages it for me; he's one of my people."

Gaspard was soon to learn how many unfortunates in St. Pierre came under that designation, "One of my people."

They passed out into the blinding street, under the flower-blue sky. Only twenty yards or so down lay the shop where clothes could be bought. Here Gaspard for

twenty-two francs bought two suits of white drill, a pair of white canvas shoes, and an imitation panama. He put on one of the suits, and ordering the other to be sent to the address in the Rue du Morne, walked out again feeling a new man.

In all his past, a shore landing had meant a landing in grimy clothes, smoking and drinking in grimy bars, the foetor of the dock-side. Never before had he found himself walking in a clean, bright city, in clean, new clothes. It was delightful, new, absolutely new, and filled with the freshness of surprise.

A pretty capresse girl glanced at him, and that was the last touch to his vanity; he entered the office of the *Compagnie Transatlantique*, where Sagesse left him, walking with an assured step, made his deposition before the manager and one of the port authorities who was present, signed it, and then, quite sure of himself and disregarding Sagesse's advice, demanded an indemnity for his lost kit and his wages up to date.

For once the wise Sagesse had given the wrong advice, for the manager, on his own responsibility, and partly, perhaps, as a tribute to the cleanest and most self-respecting stoker he had ever fallen in with, made out an order for the money demanded, cashed it, and Gaspard left the office richer by a hundred francs.

The tide of luck was in full flood that morning, and he did nothing to spoil it; as he passed along with the moving crowd, cafés called out to him to come in and celebrate the occasion, but he passed them by; he had no need of the help of alcohol; the bright light, the colours, the movement around him, and the light-hearted, yet languorous atmosphere of the gay city set all his southern nature aglow; just as blue eyes are made bluer by blue attire,

so the opal of the south in his mind took brighter colours from the bright colours around it.

The insect had found a leaf similar to the leaf on which it was born.

Unconscious of the fact that he was marching straight upon his fate, he passed along looking into the shops, strange shops without glass fronts or names, black shadows under arched doorways, shadows shewing merchandise and coloured people, shadows casting perfumes of flowers and fruit, garlic scents.

He was crossing the little square where the diamond fountain jet was dancing and singing in the sun, when he saw before him the figure of a girl. She was coming along in the full blaze of light, a girl of scarcely sixteen, tall, swift moving, and graceful as Atalanta, a *porteuse*, bearing on her head a tray of some merchandise covered over with a wasp-coloured scarf.

The load would have taxed a man, yet she bore it as easily as a feather; she wore no shoes, and her striped robe was caught up at the waist to give her limbs free play, shewing her leg almost to the knee.

She was of that strange race, whose blood has been mixed with the blood of the Caribs, coloured like that Grecian statuary to which during a thousand years the sun has lent some trace of his gold, till one can imagine the sunlight lingering in the honey tints of the marble.

The blue black of her hair just shewed, covered with the turban of striped material on which rested the tray.

As she came, walking erect and without a motion of the head, her dark eyes glanced from side to side, and as she reached Gaspard her eyes met his full, nor did they lower nor turn away till she had passed him.

He felt blinded as if by a flame. He turned. She

was vanishing amidst the crowd in the Rue Victor Hugo. He made a step as if to follow her, then he stopped dead as though before a barrier.

The glance had only lasted a moment, yet in that moment, in a flash, they had spoken one to the other. It was as though they had recognized one another.

He could read a mysterious something in her glance, and it was as though she had said, "Ah, there you are, from away beyond the beginning of time!"

The fountain was playing in the sun and a hundred men and women were meeting and passing each other in the little Place, but it was the meeting and passing of coloured phantoms.

A man and a woman had just met and passed one another.

A miracle of life had taken place, the old, strange miracle forever fresh, forever new. Yet nothing told of it, till, as he watched the moving crowd into which she had vanished, suddenly, as if some belfry in the sky had swung to life, came the clash and ripple of bells.

It was the *carillon* of the cathedral that rang thrice daily. Golden, joyous, sonorous; tenor and alto; beating the echoes to silver, waking ghostly voices in the mornes and high woods, floating out over the blue sea.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE BELLS AND THE RAIN

It rains very often on the west of Martinique. The day is joyous, brilliant, gaudy with the yellow of the city and the blue of sky and sea. Pelée, with his turban of cloud, sits tranquilly in eternal summer, then, as though at the pointing of some wizard's wand, it rains. Clouds overcast the blue, the thunder of the rain on roof and verandah mixes with the rush of rivulet and runnel.

It was as though the bells had called the clouds. Suddenly the people were scampering, the rain was lashing. Gaspard, who had sought the shelter of a doorway, could hear the thunder of the verandahs all along the Rue Victor Hugo, an arpeggio played by the fingers of the rain. Wind had risen, and from above came the voice of the great trees beating their wet green bands together, the sigh of the palmiste bending to the wind, the whisper of tree-ferns; from the street below the Rue Victor Hugo came the fainter tune of rain-stricken verandah and flowing runnel, laughter, voices calling one to another across the dividing rain, the voices of children and, still, through it all, the bells.

Rain, wind, tree sounds, perfumes of new wet foliage and earth, spouting of the gouyave water, children's voices, and through it all the *carillon* of the bells, sweet, joyous vibrant, like the voice of the love that lives through darkness as through sunshine.

And now, look! A burst of blue above; the bells have broken a way to heaven, a last thunder from the verandahs, like a parting salvo, and the squall is making a rainbow over the blue sea.

It is over. The verandahs and shop doors are emptying, pretty faces are turned up to the sky as if to test the truth of its blueness, and white umbrellas are opening against the sun.

Gaspard leaving shelter set out to find the Rue du Morne.

His mind was still filled with the image of the girl, the girl with the face of a beautiful child and the eyes of a woman, but the business he was on soon drove her picture from his mind.

"Monsieur, can you direct me to the Rue du Morne?"

Monsieur, an old Creole gentleman under a white umbrella, can and does, but his directions are given in the Creole *patois*, and so rapidly that what he says seems one word. Gaspard making out that the Rue du Morne lies somewhere below finds a side street leading downward to the blue dream of the harbour.

One could almost tumble into the harbour from here, at least in imagination. Never was there so steep a street, it is mostly steps, foot-worn, moss-grown, murmurous with water, for the side runnels are in spate after the rain.

"Madame, can you direct me to the Rue du Morne?"

In the street below an old Creole lady under a white umbrella, the female replica of the old gentleman in the street above, replies to the question volubly, and also seemingly in one word.

He gathers that it lies somewhere up above, but too lazy to climb he pursues his way along the street which is a replica of the Rue Victor Hugo. It is now getting towards the drowsy time of day. The streets are emptying.

He enquires his way as he goes and everyone is delighted to direct him. Sometimes it seems the Rue du Morne lies above, sometimes below; he comes to the conclusion that all these delightful people do not know in the least what they are talking about. In another city he would now be irritable, in St. Pierre he is only drowsy, mesmerised by the hopeless search; it does not seem to matter a bit, he would just as soon sleep under that coloured sky when it is filled with stars, as in a room in the Rue du Morne, No. 3.

A banana-coloured baby eating a banana at a doorway draws his attention, he is fond of children, and this thing, stark naked like a honey-coloured cupid, attracts him.

He takes his hat off to it derisively.

"Monsieur, can you direct me to the Rue du Morne?"

It can, apparently, in a voice hoarse as a crow's and with a thumb pointed to the sky, then it vanishes into the house suspicious, maybe, that it has been trapped into talking to a *Zombi*.

*Zombis* are evil spirits, shapes, wizards. Now, in a little street, steep as a stairway, dusky with house shadows, framing a glimpse of blue sea, he asks the question for the last time of an old woman with a patient, kindly face, who has come to her doorway for a breath of air.

"Yes, this is the Rue du Morne, and No. 3, this is it."

She is Manman Faly.

They like each other at sight, and he explains what he wants, shews her a handful of money, and follows her into the house.

She shews him into a room clean, but almost destitute of furniture.

In one corner is an "elephant," not an animal, but a mattress two feet thick.

It is the thing he has been yearning for. St. Pierre has

seized him at last, the drowsy languorous spirit has been leading him by the arm for the last half hour, it leads him now to the mattress and tells him to lie down. He does, and almost immediately falls asleep, whilst Man'm Faly closes the door and leaves him to take her own siesta.

Towards the evening he wakes up, has some food, a drink at the bars by the star-flashing harbour, returning sober and early to his room.

There is no glass to the window of his room—not a pane of glass in the whole city, except maybe the coloured panes of the cathedral—and as he lies fully awake before sleeping, he can hear through the slats of the shutters, the voice of St. Pierre by night; the tune of a thousand rivulets, fountains, water-pipes.

The whole city is held by sleep, yet it sings the whole night long, answering the sea below, and the woods above.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### LOVE

IN the south, at night, the trees are full of voices. Dare you sit in the woods of Martinique at night you would hear in the green twilight that the moon makes through the leaves, an orchestra louder and more fantastic than ever filled a midsummer's night's dream.

Here in the daytime there is silence. One can hear the waterfall, the distant river, the wind in the trees above, sounds that only serve to make the background of silence more apparent.

At high noon, when the light is fullest, when the heat is greatest, and the wind above stricken dead, the silence of the woods is terrific.

There is no silence in the whole world like to this, unless it be the dumbness of a great multitude.

Around you on all sides life is rocketing and blazing; orchids, hibiscus, bursts of bloom, ceibas, sand-box trees, air shoots of the wild pine blossom and riot, uncanny because of their demonstrative life in this silence.

But at dark all changes. Night rushes into the high woods like some mad musician, conductor of an orchestra crazy as himself.

The blue day outside closes up swiftly like a great painted fan, just like the pictures on a fan rapidly closed, St. Pierre tucks itself into a pocket of shadow, the morne and mountains are shrivelled up, Pelée alone remains sun-strick-

en still, then he, too, vanishes in a crease and as suddenly reappears; for the fan, flirled open again to its full extent, shews the same picture, only this time it is lit by starlight or the light of the moon.

It is with the first closing out of the light that the orchestra of the woods begins; shrill, tremulous, like the bleating of a flock of lilliputian goats, the voices of the *cabritt-bois* and his mates fill the shadows, then the moon strikes the green heart of the forest and it springs alive like a rattle. A million fantastic things give tongue. One might fancy forms to fit the insect noises of the northern woods, but the wildest imagination pauses before the possibilities of this tropical band, these drummers and harpers whose burr and rattle sways and surges beneath the farandole of the fireflies.

At four o'clock, just as Pelée sights the coming sun, and the dawn is coming over the sea like a lilac-coloured breeze, the *cabritt-bois* ceases his bleating and Plong! the last harper plucks the final note from his harp-string. The drummers put up their drums, the oboe, and piccolo, the microscopic sax-horn player, the bones, and flute, pocket or shoulders their instruments and depart—for dreamland maybe.

They have made music all night, music that has reached even the dreamers of St. Pierre. The people asleep in the city become aware in their sleep that something has ceased, the faint haze of sound from the great wood above surrounds them no longer and they wake.

Gaspard awoke just as the wood music ceased. On the black floor of the room the dawn through the slats of the shutter was laying seven blue-grey bars upon the floor.

He had been dreaming of the island and of Sagesse. They had burst into the treasure ship and the strand was

strewn with bars of gold. Then he lost Sagesse and was hunting for him and for Yves. It was full day, and the island lay sweltering under the sun. He could see nothing of the man he was in search of; then, far away at the end of the little coral pier he saw a form that made him forget both Yves and Sagesse, the form of a girl.

As he drew closer, he saw that it was the girl. The girl of the little Place where the fountain played. The Place de la Fontaine as he called it in his own mind, not knowing its real name.

She was standing with her tray balanced on her head as though she had just landed, now she was laughing as she saw him coming towards her, laughing as only the girls of Montpellier or Avignon can laugh and, as he came along the ridge of coral he was laughing too, as he balanced himself, fearful of falling. Then the ridge of coral became the yard of a ship, the blue water below became distant, and the dream broke up.

Happy dream. He had almost forgotten her last night, chatting and smoking with foreign sailors at the bar of a tavern. She must have struck him hard to make him dream about her like that, for in the dream it seemed to him he had known her a long time, that he was her declared lover; this girl whom he had never seen before and whom he might never meet again.

Now, a tap came to the door, and his landlady's voice offered him coffee or syrup. She brought the coffee in, and placed it on the floor beside him and put the shutters aside, so that the window space became a square dim disc of light, through which, with a breathing of wind, came a tang from the sea below and a breath from the woods above.

St. Pierre was already astir; he could hear women's voices and the prattle of children, Creole street cries; un-

familiar voices, scents, and sounds came through the open window space, awakening him thoroughly, and awakening in him a keen sense of curiosity such as he had never experienced in any other port.

The people here seemed different from the people anywhere else. Like a child who, turning over the leaves of a dull book, comes upon a surprising and joyously-coloured picture, he felt a pleasure he could neither analyse nor understand. An educated man would have felt as he felt, but cursed by convention and knowledge, and the catch words of language, he would not have felt it so freshly as this child of the south, who, like all the children of the south had some inborn love for all that the true poets sing about and true artists paint.

Having dressed himself he left the house. Man'm Faly was nowhere to be seen, and the Rue du Morne was steeped in curious twilight shewing at its end an extraordinary vision of twilit sea, spreading out to ghost-blue sea and out, away, and beyond the great mountain shadows, to a sea of stainless azure.

He struck upwards to the street above, and then by a flight of steps to the Rue Victor Hugo. The street was astir. *Blanchisseuses* with bundles making their way to the Rivière Roxelane, *calendeuses* on their way to their employment, shopkeepers, children, *porteuses* balancing their loads upon their heads, starting on the long journeys these women make daily over the island, all moving in the twilight of very early dawn with, overhead, the hyacinth-blue sky of morning.

The great fan picture of starlit city, sea, and wood, had been snapped to, and now the magic fan was slowly reopening to shew the same picture sunlit. Pelée and the sea were already in view, and as Gaspard made his way

along the Rue Victor Hugo, the day bloomed brighter overhead, dimness of hyacinths turning to the flashing of sapphires. The air, though still surcharged with shadow, had in it now an obscure brightness, a negative light that became positive where any bright surface shewed, shadows were beginning to form, and the little fountain in the Place de la Fontaine was returning from a dancing and whispering ghost to the form of a dancing diamond flower.

He followed the street as it dipped and rose and dipped again to the Rivière Roxelane. He was wondering in what house of all this strange city, what street, was hidden the girl of yesterday.

He had taken his way along the Rue Victor Hugo and through the little Place, perhaps because it was there he had met her; who knows; he was quite unconscious of the manner in which she had taken hold upon him, and, infecting him with that dark glance, had caused something to stir and live in his blood; unconscious as the man who was yesterday infected by malaria and to whom the first faint chill tells nothing of the burning fever to follow.

He paused for a moment on the bridge and looked down at the ghost-dim river raving along to the sea; the banks seemed strewn with snow, it was the linen of the washerwomen, he could hear their voices above the rushing of the river, and the sound they made beating the clothes against the boulders.

Then he passed on and found himself in the market-place on the Place du Fort.

Long before light, under the stars, boats from the fishing grounds had been making for St. Pierre, laden with the catch of the night. From Calebasse, Morne Rouge, Mari-got, Vauclin, men and animals laden with country produce had come into the city before dusk on the previous evening.

Light was now striking through the trees of the market-place, the stalls were set out and laden, boats had been dragged right up from the shore on rollers, and their flashing cargoes were being unladen right at the stalls, great fish still quivering and jumping with life, an albicore, big almost as a shark, that took three men to lift, blue fish, black fish, silver fish, fish that looked as though carefully painted by hand, fish of all the forms that fish can possibly take, lay exposed on the stalls or were being unladen from the boats.

When Gaspard entered the market the place was in shadow; flowers, fish, fruit were there, merchants to sell them, and people to buy them, but it was like a market-place in dreamland—a shadowy, yet living and moving picture, almost voiceless—. Pelée is holding everything in his mesmeric gloom.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is morning, yet it is not. Then, almost in a moment everything changes, golden sunbeams stray through the leaves of the trees, the Place du Fort becomes beautiful with bright light and liquid shadow, an unutterably blue sea is born suddenly, and as if by enchantment beneath a sky of unutterable blue. The market-place thrills, fills with voices, it is like a great cage of birds that break into chatter and song at the first touch of sunlight; you can hear the songs of the *canotiers* from the sea, songs of the fishermen as they haul the last boatful of fish—hale it right through the market, laughing as they sing and followed by naked laughing children; girls' voices, men's voices, buyers, sellers, idlers all mix and blend with the fresh voice of the sea. It has a touch of the morning of the world before the smoke of the first cities dimmed the beauty of the dawn, before man had learned to weep and think. Here amidst

the tamarinds and the early sunlight of the Place du Fort, for a moment you can catch the blue robe of the past, for a moment you can stand in the market-place of early Alexandria, for a moment you can glimpse the Agora of Athens in her early youth, touch the summer that vanished before Rome flung out her bastions and those legions whose spears reflected the last gleams of the Golden Age.

For a moment—then Finotte flutters before you in her wasp-coloured turban, basket in hand, and beautiful as a butterfly in her striped foulard, and you are back again in St. Pierre.

\* \* \* \* \*

With these people a man of Gaspard's class could fraternize and find friends at sight. Touched with the spirit of the place, he laid hold of the gunwale of the last boat and helped to haul her along, the Creole boatman laughing and chattering with him in the *patois* which he only half understood. He was French and a man from the big ships, evidently out for a spree, that was enough for them. When they had got the boat in position at a corner of the fish market, for the place was divided, the fish and meat being sold at one side, fruit, vegetables, and flowers at the other, they began to sell their fish right from the boat without troubling to put it on a stall.

Heavens! what fish were in that boat, and what a picture they made fresh from the sea and still quivering; frilled, horned, spined, fantastically coloured. Black and red *perroquets*, *souris* pink and orange, blue fish, yellow fish, all glittering like jewels; gelatinous masses that came in clinging to the nets, seaweeds. It was as though a great hand had been dipped in the tropical sea bringing up everything it could grasp. One looked for a mermaid—now the boatmen hammering with sticks were calling out their

wares, holding up their fish, joking with the crowd; Gaspard joining in, his white teeth and dark eyes flashing, the picture of one of those boatmen one sees on the sea-steps of Naples, only better dressed. He had seized a huge eel and was holding it up, in a moment it was gone, bought, and Pierre-Alphonse—so he had dubbed the chief boatman—nicknaming him with any name that came first into his head, as these men do—was pocketing the coins. Pierre-Alphonse had conducted the barter whilst Gaspard had held the eel, a pretty girl had bought it and carried it off in her basket, and now Pierre-Alphonse seizing a monster shaped like a little barrel, a *barrigue de vin*—thrust it into the new salesman's hands. "Sell him too, thou man from the sea—Fish! fish! fish! who'll buy?—all alive and breathing, all fresh from the water, *tonne, volant, balaou*, all leaping at thee. Hi Dodotte—Pauline, where are you going with your baskets—fill them." He seemed to know everyone; the little children crowded round, he gave them handfuls of *sádines*, little white fish, let them pick seaweed out of the boat, patted them on the head, all with his left hand, as it were, whilst with his right hand and the whole energy of his mind and body he continued selling. He was a big man, Pierre-Alphonse, with a big, dark, smiling face good to look at altogether, and evidently a "character" of the market, and a favourite.

Gaspard had sold the *barrigue de vin* to a syndicate of two old women who had combined to buy it, and perhaps peddle it round town with other produce, for they had with them a small cane truck, when, turning to the boat to find something else to sell, he saw in the midst of the surrounding crowd the girl. She was without her tray, her little shapely head was bound with a yellow and blue madras, she had a basket in her hand, and she was coming to buy



fish. Then she saw Gaspard. Their eyes met and she instantly looked away.

Pierre-Alphonse saw her, too.

Not only had she looked away, she had turned away.

Pierre-Alphonse's mouth flew open:

"Hi, Marie—Marie de Morne Rouge—ho, Marie, are you deaf this morning? Here are the fish calling thee—she's gone—" Then to Gaspard, "Now what devil has got into the girl—she often buys from me, she was coming, and she is gone—no matter, here is another *barrique*—sell him, O thou man from the sea—"

"Who is she?" asked Gaspard, taking the *barrique*.

"Marie—whose father lives at Morne Rouge."

"Where does she live?"

"With her aunt in the street of the Precipice. Ho, there, Mayotte, here is a fish for thee pretty as thyself—take it for nothing—next to nothing, two sous and it is thine, 'tis as big as a baby—"

"What is she, this Marie?"

"A *porteuse*—there, 'tis thine—wait till I get the change, and thy mother, how is she? All sweetly I hope—there, take thy change, little one—" all in the *patois* that takes the sharpness from words, makes new words of old, a tropical growth of language, coloured, quaint, infantile.

Gaspard turned to Pierre-Alphonse. "Well, I must be going, good luck—" He disengaged himself from a fishy embrace and, followed by a shower of good wishes from Pierre-Alphonse and his crew, mingled with the crowd. The girl was nowhere to be seen, there were pretty girls everywhere, but he had no eyes for them.

Was she angry with him? Why had she turned away? Five minutes ago, as he stood there helping Pierre-Alphonse to sell his fish, he had forgotten her; if he had never seen

her again he would not have troubled very much; but, now, something inexplicable had happened, the world had altered in a flash, it was as though to a man going blindly along a misty road the vision of a beautiful and unattainable country had suddenly appeared through a rent in the mist which closed again destroying the vision, but leaving the dream. He was in love.

He crossed the Place, and wandered amongst the stalls where fruit, vegetables, and flowers were sold. Here the air had a heady and intoxicating perfume, the place was glorious with colour, piles, and mounds of colour, such fruit! such vegetables! such flowers! Egg plants, pommes d'Haiti, oranges—green oranges, tiny monkey oranges, giant oranges—giant apricots each the size of a turnip, osier baskets filled with green nutmegs, custard apples, guavas, white and green christophines, prickly pears—then the vegetables, palm tops, and sweet potatoes, bread fruit—choux. And the flowers, grenadilla blossoms and *fleurs d'amour*, flowers of the Loseille Bois, delicate butterfly blossoms, poised as if forever in the act of taking flight. Gaspard had ceased looking for the girl in the kaleidoscopic throng around him, he was standing at a stall half of which was laden with fruit of every colour, the other half with every coloured flowers when, turning, he found that she was beside him.

She was quite unconscious of the fact. Wandering amidst the crowd she had drifted against him, touched him with her elbow without being aware of whom she was touching until he turned and their eyes met for the third time in their lives; then, all at once, and as though the faint reflection of a rose had been cast upon her face and neck, she blushed—it was less a blush than a deepening of the southern dusk beneath her skin.

It told him at once that she recognised him, not only that; in some mysterious way it told him that she had been thinking of him. It gave him courage.

*"Bonjour, mademoiselle."*

*"Bonjou, missie."*

It was the salutation that everyone gave to everyone else in St. Pierre, strangers, friends, everyone. She was passing on when, picking up a spray of the *fleur d'amour* from the stall and flinging some coins on the board, he handed the branch laden with delicate blossoms to her. She took it, glanced at him with a half smile, then she looked at the flowers as though she had never seen flowers before, her lips were moving, she was murmuring something, speaking to the flowers, to the branch, "Oh, thou art pretty—thou art sweet." Then she had passed away; with a glance and a little bow to the giver of the flowers she had dissolved before his sight in the coloured moving throng.

But her voice remained with him, the caressing words she had spoken to the flowers in the infantile French of the tropics.

"Oh, thou art pretty—thou art sweet—" She had spoken to the flowers, but it seemed to Gaspard she had spoken of herself. She had described herself unconsciously in a sentence.

He passed on. He did not wish to find her again just then. The vision held him satisfied for the moment. She was not angry, more than that, she was not indifferent. To this man, direct and fierce in love as in hate, this girl of his own class was a revelation, she seemed less a woman than a flower that had suddenly blossomed in his path.

The elements of all the grandest poetry live in the commonest man; deaf to the stuff of the drawing-room ballad maker, blind to the embroideries of art, the eternal terrors

and beauties of nature move him much or little as the case may be, but they move him. The commonest man would have felt something of the poetry, simple, and sweet, yet exotic and beyond words fascinating, which this girl carried with her—cast around her as the *fleur d'amour* casts its colour and perfume.

"O thou art pretty—thou art sweet—" He was turning to leave the market-place when a scream from one of the market women made him wheel round.

The stall just behind him had been upset, the crowd was scattering in every direction.

"*Fer de lance—fer de lance!*"

The cry echoed from one end of the Place to the other, and Gaspard found himself standing alone, face to face with an old gentleman dressed in white and holding a white umbrella over his head.

The old man, though seemingly paralysed by terror, had not dropped his umbrella. His eyes were fixed on the ground where, writhing in the dust, a yellow snake was raising its head to strike him.

It was a *fer de lance*, young, about three feet in length, but terrible as Death himself. It had come to market hidden in the great clusters of yellow bananas, frightened and ferocious; hating the sunlight, it was preparing to strike at the man before it, terror striking at terror.

The sight of the reptile left Gaspard quite unperturbed. The smallest minority of the great human race are certainly the people who have no dread of snakes. Gaspard belonged to this few, a strange fact considering his imaginative nature. It is true he knew nothing of the *fer de lance* and its terrors, but if he had, I doubt if he would have done otherwise than he did.

The snake, obsessed by its objective, did not perceive

the fearless enemy behind it; springing forward in a flash Gaspard seized it naked-handed just below the horrible triangular head; seizing it four inches lower down with his left hand he almost twisted the head from the body, breaking the spine at the neck. Then he flung the remains on the ground and planted his heel on the head, crushing bone and demon brain, and burning eyes into the dust.

The next moment it seemed to him that the world had gone mad and was trying to smother him. The old man he had saved was clinging to his neck, the whole market was surging round him; men laughing, women weeping, and crying out to the Virgin. One might have thought Gaspard the bearer of the news of some national triumph, the saviour of the island—that is to say, if one were not acquainted with the Creole mind and its excitability. Then a ring was formed and he found himself in the centre of it, the old man—still with the umbrella over his head—holding his hand, shaking it, and talking at the same time.

"I am Monsieur Seguin, any of these good people here know me—" murmurs of assent from the crowd, "you have saved my life at the risk of your own, I am your friend. Ask what you will, I am not poor, my house is yours, and all I possess. My life is yours, for have you not saved it?"

"Nothing, nothing," cried Gaspard, "I have done nothing. I am not afraid of snakes—" then with a touch of Tartarin in his tone, "They never bite me."

They never bit him! He who had never handled one before—but the crowd knew nothing of this, they took it as a statement of fact. This man, then, was a prodigy, he handled the dreaded *fer de lance* as a poulterer handles a chicken. Before noon that fact had become the news of the day in St. Pierre, and Gaspard half a hero, half a wizard.

"All the same," said old M. Seguin, "you have saved my life, monsieur, but I will thank you in another place than this—have you breakfasted? No? Well then, I pray of you come with me and accept of my hospitality."

With his hand upon Gaspard's arm he led him away through the crowd which divided before them, across the Place, across the Rivière Roxelane, into the Rue Victor Hugo.

Here at a café they breakfasted.

During the meal the old gentleman who had a strong and vivacious personality of his own, questioned his guest as to his past, present, and future. Though good-hearted, evidently, and evidently a power in St. Pierre, M. Seguin was not of the highest refinement. He shewed this in the manner in which he cross-questioned his *vis-à-vis*, for at once he had gauged Gaspard's social position and his manner was that of an employer standing treat to an employée, but his every movement and every word, the tone of his voice and the kindness in his old eyes proclaimed the fact that he was a "straight man."

Gaspard told of the wreck, and sketched his story till he came to the name of Sagesse.

"Sagesse!" cried his questioner. "Pierre Sagesse?"

"Yes—that is his name."

One might have fancied that another *fer de lance* had shown itself, so great was the loathing and hatred that appeared in the face of M. Seguin. Then he smothered his emotions and helped himself to more coffee.

"Beware of that man. He is not a man, he is a *fer de lance*. Poisonous. He landed you here? Well, you will of course have no more to do with him."

Gaspard explained that he was bound to go on an expedition with the said *fer de lance* as soon as *La Belle Arlé-*

*sienne* had cleared her cargo. He said nothing of the treasure or the object of the expedition, but I doubt if he had, whether M. Seguin would have heard him.

"But you will not go."

"But I must—I have given my word."

"Ah, you have given your word. Well, a word given must not be taken back even from Pierre Sagesse. But do not get entangled with him if you can help it. Look!" He pointed to a huge spider passing along the wall. "That is Pierre Sagesse. He is a man-spider, who treats other men as a spider treats flies. Gets them into his power, binds them up, and sucks them dry. He is my greatest enemy," said the old man frankly enough, "and I am the only man who has ever got the better of him. He hates me. I think I am the only man he really hates; a nature like his does not give itself to hate, it would be a waste of energy." Then suddenly, "Has he bound you?"

Gaspard, surprised at the question and its far-reaching nature, was about to reply. But the old man had read the fact in his face.

"Don't trouble to say it—only this—if he has, Paul Seguin will be your friend. Ah, you do not know Sagesse. He has numerous poor folk here quite under his horrid thumb, men to whom he has lent money, men whom he has got power over, and he works them like slaves, negroes. Well, now, when you come back from this expedition you will stay in St. Pierre, and you will let me put you in the way of making money. I own many of those boats that go to the fishing. I can make you quite a comfortable place, and you will settle amongst us and marry some pretty girl. A fine fellow like you will have his pick of the best."

Gaspard laughed. Here was a prospect if the treasure hunt turned out fruitless.

"*Ma foi*," said he. "I will take your offer righthanded. I have never struck such a place as this, and I never hope to leave it when I return from this voyage—and to think that I should have the luck to meet you all through a snake."

"My friend," said M. Seguin, "there is a Martinique proverb that says, 'He who kills a snake is forgiven seven deadly sins.' So you have purged yourself of seven sins and made a friend for life—do not let us despise snakes."

For the first time Gaspard felt the pleasantness of the fact that he had that morning saved a life. Dead Yves appeared before him. Here was a life to balance that life he had taken. Then in a flash appeared before him Anisette, selling drinks at the bar of the Riga. Heavens! was it possible that he had ever loved or thought of that tallow-faced, under-sized creature!

Marie, Marie of Morne Rouge, had slain the evil shade of Anisette in his mind, just as a sunbeam slays a shadow.

Then he said good-bye to M. Seguin, promising to call and see him at the address which the old man gave him upon a card.

He turned down hill to the sea front where on the Place Bertine, amidst the sugar hogsheads, talking to one of the port officials, he saw Sagesse. The owner of *La Belle Arlésienne* was laughing, gesticulating and, as Gaspard passed to emphasise some remark, he brought his great thumb down on the top of a sugar cask.

Gaspard could not but remember M. Seguin's words about the unfortunate people under that "horrid thumb."



## CHAPTER XIX

### MARIE OF MORNE ROUGE

THE street of the Precipice hung literally between sea and sky; almost as steep as a ladder, so steep that the causeway here and there broke into flights of steps, just as a river breaks into waterfalls. You saw, looking upwards, far above you, the green of the high woods, and looking downwards, far below you the harbour, blue at noon and emerald in the morning. Nothing could be more beautiful in its way than this old, narrow, unfashionable street during those hours in the morning when the harbour, gauze-green and ghostly, gazed up as through a well of twilight at the woods, black-green against the brightening sky.

Old as the time of Josephine, the street of the Precipice held in these morning hours the twilight of romance. The murmurs of the sea below and the woods above, the trickling and tinkling of the gonyave water flowing down its runnels seemed voices speaking of the past, times long gone, women vanished, men once brave—now ghosts.

In the full blaze of noon, the old street shone out bright with colours and moving with people; then, as the hour of siesta approached, it gradually emptied, the great heat of afternoon seemed to dry up its stream of life, the song of the *calendeuse* over her work, the note of a guitar, voices from the harbour side seemed less sounds than echoes of sound, green lizards slipped from shadow to

shadow or basked openly in the heat. Then as the sun declined, the old street began to speak again and live, the sunset rushed up it like a torchbearer, setting fire to roof and gable, yellow house wall, coloured garments of women, up, up, lighting the woods far above—lighting the stars and leaving them burning and leaping in the dusky blue.

This was the children's hour. You could hear their voices as they played, told their stories, sang their songs, whilst the blue above became more dark, more definite, more filled with stars.

It was here in this old street that Marie lived with her aunt, Man'm Charles, in a house on the right as you went up from the harbour and close to the passageway leading to the Rue Buonaparte.

Born sixteen years ago up at the village of Morne Rouge, she had paid for life the greatest payment that life can extract from a human being. She had lost her mother. Her father, who owned the only shop in the village, had been fairly prosperous in a small way; besides the shop he owned a small farm, and three times a week he would come into the market at St. Pierre to sell his produce, leaving the shop to the care of his sister, Ti Finotte, a woman of forty, a woman once tall, stately, beautiful as any woman in Martinique, but now a cripple, broken down, slain by hard work. She had been a *porteuse*.

The *porteuse* of Martinique is a race apart; she is in reality a peddler, selling everything from fruit to ribbons. She carries her tray upon her head and her goods upon the tray, and her load would break an Englishman down were he to carry it half a dozen miles. She thinks nothing of it. Wonderful is not the word for the work done by these women, graceful, sometimes slightly built, often beautiful, who, with their loads perfectly balanced, bare-footed,

dressed in clothing slight as the clothing of the ancient Greeks, will travel fifty miles in a day from village to village, over hill and dale, under the tropical sun, joyous as children, pleasant, sweet to look upon, yet fated to die at last—from overwork!

Yet they do not complain, nor do they look back on their lives with bitterness; hard though the work is, it is free from constraint of walls and houses and masters; it is lonely passing from village to village amidst the mountains, but they have the companionship of sun and wind and distance. So Ti Finotte, though she was dying from the hardships of life and though she loved little Marie, made no opposition when Marie's father declared his intention of making a *porteuse* of the child.

Marie was four years of age when he came to this decision, and he came to it because he could see no better future for her. Since the birth of Marie he had fallen upon evil days; wishing to extend his farm, he had borrowed money, and he had borrowed it from Sagesse, then a rising power in St. Pierre; a bad crop and a tornado crippled him in this new development of his business, he had to apply to Sagesse for another loan, and from that dated his ruin.

Things always worked in a diabolical manner in favour of Sagesse: If he lent a man money something was sure to happen to prevent that man paying the interest or working off the debt; then, when his business had been seized by the money-lender things would take a turn, trade would revive, crops would be splendid—and the benefit would fall to Sagesse.

It was so with the father of Marie. The year after his property had fallen into the hands of the money-lender a wave of prosperity passed over Martinique. He still

lived at Morne Rouge, the paid servant of Sagesse, over-seeing the little farm that once was his own, he saw the canes growing so heavy and so tall that the harvesters could scarcely make way amidst them, the bananas bending beneath the weight of their huge yellow clusters, yet he did not grumble; it was Fate, and he made the best of the business for himself and Marie.

When Marie was fifteen and old enough to begin the business of *porteuse*, Ti Finotte died, and Marie came to live with the aunt in the Street of the Precipice and to act as *porteuse* in the employ of M. Sartine, the dealer in foulards, ribbons, madras handkerchiefs, and women's apparel, whose shop was in the Rue Victor Hugo. The death of Ti Finotte had stricken the child to the heart, for she was still but a child despite her fifteen years and her figure, tall, straight, supple—almost the figure of a woman; the change from the sun blaze of Morne Rouge to the shadowy old street of the Precipice had seemed part of the mournful change that had come in her life with the death of the woman who had been a second mother to her; her aunt, Man'm Charles, a *calendreuse* by trade, was a stern woman, religious, a devotee, and without much heart or sympathy for young people—yet in a fortnight the girl had adapted herself to her new life and had come to love the old street, its voices, its colours, its dimness, and its mystery.

It had told her its secret. A secret that could only be told to a poet or a child. Man'm Charles knew nothing of this secret, the traders and hawkers, the brazier who lived by the passageway into the Rue Buonaparte, the baker whose shop was opposite the brazier's, knew nothing of it. For them it was just a street, for Marie it was a mystery half understood. The old houses, the

shadows, the steps moss-grown and tread-worn, the twilight of early morning, the whispering of the gouyave water, all these spoke to her, telling her things—things about the past, things about the future, hints of the mystery of life—as though the people who had once lived there and loved there had left some voice behind them, some echo of their story.

Three days a week, early in the morning, just as Pelée was showing hard against the dawn, she would leave for M. Sartine's, receive her tray of goods and start on her journey, carrying it as though it were a thing of no weight.

To see her life and work, one must follow her as, leaving the Rue Victor Hugo, up through the steep and twilight streets, she passes, moving as no woman can move who does not walk barefooted, passing with the silence of a ghost and the grace of Atalanta, giving good-day to every one she meets, friends or strangers, up, up, past the Rue Peysette, the Rue Petit Versailles, till the houses begin to disappear and the road turns from a street to a country road set on either side with balisiers, gigantic ferns, whispering canes; scented with damp earth and the perfume of the night jasmine.

Up here, were she to look back, she would see the city at her feet still twilit and half asleep, the bay blue but still filled with night, and beyond the shadow of the island, away to the west, the sea sparkling in the sunlight.

But she does not look back nor turn her head. Her eyes, ever on the watch for the dreaded *fer de lance*, are fixed on the roadway before her.

Every moment, the sky above is becoming more filled with light, and as she climbs it seems to her that she is climbing to the sunlight; now, the road, more level, is turning the great shadow of Pelée, and before her the twilight of morning is turning to the blue of day.

The road takes a sharp bend, she turns it, and she is enveloped in a flame of sunshine, the warm blowing trade wind which the mountains shut off from St. Pierre blows in her face. *Zombis*, snakes, evil spirits, all the Fears that haunt darkness, are banished by the sunlight, blown away by the wind.

Away up here, so high above everything, she seems the only person in the world; there is not a soul in sight; cane fields, valleys, mornes, mountains purple and blue, the dazzling azure sea—distances and colours lie before her. Silence and sunlight.

She always pauses here as one pauses when one meets a friend. The greatest poet, the meanest man, would do the same in face of this supreme loveliness.

As she looks from the blue sea to the green mornes and from the mornes to the blue mountains over which La Trace, the great white highroad, passes like a narrow white ribbon, she talks to it all in an undertone. She knows nothing of where the sea leads to, she knows nothing of the sun, or whether the earth moves round him or he round the earth, she is ignorant of these things as the prehistoric woman. That is perhaps why she understands it all so well, this great picture to which she speaks in an undertone, caressingly as a child speaks to its mother.

Then the road draws her back again and she passes on with her burden on her head, walking swiftly and easily, straight as a flame, a beautiful picture against the whispering canes that line the road, the palmistes, and the ferns.

Her journey may be as far as Grande Anse, she may be going to sell her goods at Calabasse, at Marigot, or Vauclin; far or near, it is all the same to her.

At noon, she is travelling still; across those blue hills in the torrid light of midday you will find her passing

on her way; she has sold some of her goods, and there are coins in the little bag at her girdle. But she is not thinking of them. Of what is she thinking? Ah, if you were to lead her life, always active, always in the open air, you would know that thought can live in suspension. Not the suspension of sleep, but of half slumber, wide awake to all external things, yet dwelling on none especially. She would see, as she went, the hills change as the road turned, far mountains vanish as the road dipped, and reappear as it rose again, distant vistas of blue sea peeping at her between the mornes, fields of green cane waving to the breeze, woods breaking into view; and the woods would push the sea aside and the cane fields take the place of the woods, and the green mornes of the cane fields, and the sea of the mornes. So full was she of life and energy that movement, so far from tiring her, was more pleasant than rest, mesmerising her, lulling her, till at times it almost seemed as though she were not moving at all, that it was the scenery which was moving, hills, fields, mountains, and sea, shifting, altering, giving place one to the other to peep at her on her journey.

In a year she was known all over the island. The negroes cutting the cane would pause to look at Marie of Morne Rouge, the prettiest *porteuse* in Martinique, and give her good-day; at the villages where she called with her wares, she did a better trade than any other *porteuse*; her prettiness had little to do with this success, for her customers were women, but she had a way with her, an innocence, a sweetness, that made her pleasant as a rose.

Needless to say, in Martinique, where hearts are as inflammable as tinder, she had admirers, scores, hundreds—but she had no lover.

When young men came to talk to her they found them-

selves at a loss before this girl who spoke to them eye to eye, frankly, freely, as a friend might speak to a friend. She did not seem to know that she was a girl; other girls—all the girls in St. Pierre of her age—had lovers, visions of Love, visions of Cupids with tinsel wings, wedding wreaths, all the frippery that goes to make marriage the woman's pageant. Marie had no visions of these things. Her mind was of that rare order of woman's mind which holds all the love of heaven in solution, but no image of Love till the man she is fated to meet meets her, glances at her, speaks to her, and at a stroke makes her his forever.

These are the women who are the heroines of the real tragedies of life—and of the immortal tales of Love.



## CHAPTER XX

### FATE

ONE day, M. Sartine sent Marie to call at a house on the highroad that leads across the Morne Parnasse. Her business was to shew some lace to a Spanish lady, Señora Vigil, and to sell it if possible.

The Señora had come to Martinique by chance; she had taken this house—the Château Principe—by chance, and yesterday she had entered M. Sartine's shop by chance to buy some lace. She might just as easily have gone to the shop of M. Custine, or to the Fleur d'Avril, or to the Bon Marché, but chance—whose other name is Fate—led her into the shop of M. Sartine.

Marie, who had sold the whole quantity of lace to the Señora, was returning to St. Pierre well pleased and in high spirits. It was her sixteenth birthday and it had brought her the pleasantest surprise in the world.

Finotte, Dodotte, Florine, Honorine, all her girl friends and acquaintances, had remembered the day; each had brought a little present, a trifle, less than a trifle, a box of sea shells blazing with colour, a scarf, a string of beads—the brazier across the way and the baker, had remembered her; they did not bring presents, but they called out good wishes as she passed. Her aunt gave her the rarest thing she ever gave to anyone—a smile. She had not known that any of these people had cared for her till this morning, when her birthday made them speak.

And she had told no one of her birthday, or only one girl, Finette—she must have spread the news.

Then, she had been entrusted with the lace selling by M. Sartine, a most important business, in which she had succeeded. The Señora had spoken kindly to her, asked her her age, and discovering that it was her birthday, had given her a little old-fashioned cross wrought in silver and with the blessed Saviour upon it. "It has been blessed by the Archbishop of Santa Cruz," said the Señora, "and whilst you keep it nothing evil can hurt you."

It had been a wonderful morning. The sun was full in the sky as she came along the road past the Jardin des Plantes. The gates were open, they were always open, rusty and gone to decay; she could see in through the great arch of twilight made by the trees. In there amidst the palms and great tropical trees a bird was singing, calling, filling the echoes with its golden, flute-like notes. It was a *rifleur de montagne*. She paused and looked in. The great garden, once carefully tended, had gone to decay, the lianas hung like ropes between the trees; palmiste and tree fern, cedar and locust, all were roped and tangled by the lianas, the scent of vanilla came on the air from the green gloom, vanilla, and green orange, wet mould, the sad odour of decaying leaves.

It was a wonderful and mysterious place, the Jardin des Plantes; laid out when Versailles was filled with courtiers, beautiful when Josephine, not yet an empress, walked its paths, nothing dreaming of Napoleon or her fate; long gone to decay and given over now to Nature, who was slowly taking it back to herself.

Marie, when she passed the gates, always looked in fascinated and half frightened at the silent riot of trees and shrubs; but to-day it seemed less gloomy; the voice of the bird seemed to fill it with light.

"Marie! Marie! Marie! *Bonjour, Marie—Marie de Morne Rouge,*" sang the bird. She made a lovely picture as she stood in the sunlit road, listening with a half smile to the liquid golden notes of the *siffleur de montagne*.

"Marie! Marie! Marie! *Bonjour, Marie—Marie de Morne Rouge.*"

Then she sighed, turned, and passed on her way. It was as though the old garden where lovers had walked in days gone by had told her something, just as the old street of the Precipice had told her something. But what the garden told her was far less understandable; something new and strange and sad had spoken in the voice of the bird, in the silence of the green gloom. It was as though she had seen the vision of some lovely country, unattainable, a moment glimpsed, and then gone forever.

But she came through the Place du Fort and across the bridge spanning the Rivière Roxelane.

The washerwomen below were busy; she could hear their voices and their laughter; the Rue Victor Hugo was filled with people; she knew many of them, sister *porteuses*, shop-keepers, idlers, and gave them good-day as she passed.

The crowd was thinner as she drew near the little Place de la Fontaine, and she could see the water of the fountain like a diamond flower in the sunshine. As she was crossing the Place she saw a figure in white clothes coming towards her. Her eye, keen and trained to observation, noted at once that this was some stranger to St. Pierre, some man from the foreign ships, no Creole.

As she passed him, she looked him straight in the face, frankly, just as she looked every one in the face, man or woman; his eyes met her eyes full, lit up, and—she had passed on.

The crowd was around her, but she did not see it. Someone had spoken to her without words; she had spoken to someone. The world for a moment seemed empty of people, containing only herself and that mysterious someone. She scarcely remembered his face except that it was dark, and vaguely good-looking; but the eyes held her soul. He had spoken to her as a man speaks to a woman with a glance; that was nothing compared with the fact that she had spoken to him. It was as though something dumb in her, something of which she had never suspected the existence, had awoken from sleep, escaped from darkness, spoken in a strange language, and then sank back to darkness, leaving her bewildered and astonished.

For a moment as she went on her way the vision of the Jardin des Plantes rose before her, and the voice of the *siffleur de montagne* followed her: "Marie! Marie! Marie! Marie de Morne Rouge." The old love-haunted garden and the bird seemed trying to tell her something—something impossible to understand, something beyond all sadness sad, and beyond all beauty beautiful.

Then, drowning out everything, as though some belfry in the sky had flung open, came the sound of bells; it was the *carillon* of the cathedral that rings twice daily, silver bells and golden bells, tenor and alto, answered by a thousand singing echoes from high wood and harbour, street and place, floating up to the blue sky, floating out over the blue sea.

"Marie, Marie de Morne Rouge—*Bonjour*, Marie—Little *porteuse*, child of the sun, listen to us, the bells, listen to us, the echoes—we are speaking the language he spoke, birds and echoes, bells and flowers, soul of woman and soul of man, one language only have they."

"Marie de Morne Rouge—Marie."

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE FLEUR D'AMOUR

THEN, as if challenged by the bells, the clouds around Pelée spread out fanwise, the sky darkened, and Marie, taking shelter beneath a verandah, heard the rush of rain as it swept down from street to street.

The darkness and the rain were like an omen—or might have been but for the bells, ringing on, joyous, triumphant, like the love that lives through disaster and beyond death.

She heard the thunder of the rain on roof and verandah, the sky looked as though it would never clear again, and then, just as though the bells had broken a way to heaven, a blue rift shewed through the clouds, widened, spread wider still to a burst of sunshine and the clouds were passing away over the sea, sweeping it with meadows of tourmaline-coloured shadow.

Marie, leaving the shelter of the verandah, turned to the shop of M. Sartine, gave the account of her dealings with the Señora, received her meed of praise from the old shopkeeper, who was an excellent-hearted man in all things in which money was not concerned, and departed for home.

As she left the shop and entered the Rue Victor Hugo, the world seemed commonplace again, the bells had ceased ringing, the joyous morning had passed away as if the voices of the bells had carried it away out to sea with them.

She returned to the Street of the Precipice. Man'm Charles was in a bad humour; Finotte, one of the girls whom she employed in her business, had not turned up that morning and she was short-handed. The ill-temper which ought to have fallen to Finotte fell on Marie.

It is always just so in this world, the day that begins cloudless, warm, and perfect, rarely lasts till sunset.

The girl who was never for a moment idle took the place of Finotte, one might have thought that working as she did at the trade of *porteuse* a holiday might have fallen to her occasionally on such a day as this, but she did not grumble.

She set to work painting the great madras handkerchief without a murmur.

Three other girls were working in the room with her, a dim room into which the blazing sunshine of the street outside scarcely penetrated through the green slats of the shutters. Pauline, Celestine, and Florine were their names, and they chatted as they worked in the sweet childish French of the tropics. It was like the chatting of birds in a dimly lit cage. Celestine was to be married next month, Pauline and Florine had lovers, Love, marriage, other girls' lovers, heart-affairs, Rosine jilted by the fisherman Ambrose, who had gone to live at Fort de France, Lys who had jilted Achille, who had threatened to drown himself—so the conversation ran on. Birds one might imagine talking like this, one to the other in the branches of the *loseille bois* and the tamarinds. Marie took no part in the conversation, she never did when the talk ran like this. To-day as she worked, she seemed even more abstracted than usual. But she was listening—half listening, wondering why Lys had jilted Achille, why the fisherman Ambrose had jilted Rosine, interested in the troubles of these people, though she could not tell why. Yesterday

their squabbings would have been quite uninteresting to her.

Then as she worked, she saw things. The road over the Morne de Parnasse, the green gloom of the Jardin des Plantes, the sun-stricken Place du Fort, the Rue Victor Hugo and the Place de la Fontaine with the diamond flower of the fountain glittering in the sun.

Wherever her thoughts might lead her, they always strayed back to the Place de la Fontaine. Then she would see a white figure coming towards her. Her thoughts would try to escape, to turn back—impossible, they had to go on, meet face to face that someone, meet again that gaze, answer it—then only might she pass on to lose herself in the crowd, to meet the music of the bells, the *carillon* of joy; voices from the woods, echoes from the harbour side, music from heaven, echoes from earth, clasping her, folding her in waves of sound—

Just as the waves of a tropic sea breaking on the shores of an islet may tell to a man the fact of man's isolation and loneliness—loneliness that love alone can banish—so the waves of sound, brilliant, dim, sonorous or echo-broken, had told Marie the fact of woman's isolation and loneliness.

All her life suddenly appeared to her as a great loneliness. It was as though she were standing on the shore of an islet and had suddenly discovered the fact for the first time that she was utterly alone, the discovery being brought to her by the glimpse of a far-off ship, a momentary vision that had vanished, leaving her to her loneliness.

That is how real love first comes, analyse it to its depths, that tremendous wave which strikes all human beings at some time of their life, the crest may be sunlit, joyous,—but the heart is from the great ocean where loneliness is

supreme. Lifted on the joyous crest, a man sees the object of his desire, the companion of his soul; if he does not seize her, he will sink into the heart of the wave, the gloom of its loneliness, to be carried to the shore at last without ever seeing the true sunlight again.

After dark, when the stars were out and the voices of the children playing in the streets had ceased, Marie went to her room, a room so poorly furnished that one might almost say it was not furnished at all. Just a mattress on the floor, a chair, a box of cedar wood where she kept her clothes and her few possessions, and on the wall a little shrine to the Virgin, a tiny thing, gaudily painted, and with a little trough to hold flowers.

She had been brought up in the Catholic faith, she placed flowers in the little trough of the shrine and prayed to the Virgin, but I doubt if her faith was more than a fetish worship of the image of the Virgin, or if her religion gave her any comfort in bad times.

Ti Finotte had died and gone away into the darkness, the smiling Virgin in the little shrine could not stop that or say one word of comfort. In her heart of hearts, she felt religion to be an entirely one-sided affair wherein Man did everything from good works to worship and the Deity nothing. But then she was only Marie, a being come from very far away. Her people had given the Caribbean Sea its name, had hunted the wild horses before our Saviour was born, were lost to sight behind centuries of sunlight, and silence, and savagery. How could she see clearly the light, with the dawn of the world still in her eyes?

She went to bed and to the dreamless sleep that comes to the hard worker whose work lies in the open air. Next morning she was up before the stars had paled, for her



aunt had set her several tasks to do before breakfast time.

Amongst other things, she had to go to the market to buy provisions, and it was there, you will remember, that she had her second meeting with Gaspard, and his gift of the fleur d'amour,

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE ROAD TO GRANDE ANSE

NEXT morning very early Marie made her way to the Rue Victor Hugo, received her tray of goods, and started on her journey. It was a long journey to-day, right away to Grande Anse on the eastern side of the island.

She passed up the steep twilit streets, up, up, past the Rue Petit Versailles, till the houses broke up and the way began to turn from a street to a country road.

Just here she did what she had never done before, turned and looked down at the city steeped in twilight.

With the heavy load of the tray she dared not bend her head. She stood with head erect and eyes cast down, beautiful and statuesque as one of the Greek Caniphori. She was thinking, "Ah, there is someone there, in what house is he, in which street, is he awake yet or does he still sleep?"

Then, raising her eyes, she looked far over the sea, bright beyond the shadow of Pelée and the hills. She was thinking, "He came from there—where from beyond that wonderful bright sea did he come?" The sea had always been one of the mysteries of her life, and the ships that came from away beyond the horizon.

Then she turned and resumed her way along the twilit road filled with the early morning scent of tropical woods and flowers, she had forgotten her fear of the *fer de lance*. *Zombis* and evil shapes had vanished from her path—those shadows of the mind that have no existence when forgotten.

Yesterday, when she was leaving the market, she had heard the screams of the market-women and had turned to see *him* surrounded with people. He had killed the *fer de lance* with his naked hand; snakes could do him no harm, so the market people had said. That fact made the *fer de lance* less fearful to her. He did not fear it, why should she? In this tropical mind, sealed so long to love, Love had suddenly disclosed himself full grown and statuesque.

It was as though in a tropical garden gone to a state of nature, some wind had pushed the foliage aside revealing the marble form of the garden god, the statue that had been there since the garden was planted first, lurking amidst the leaves, and now seen for the first time. As she turned the shadow of Pelée, the sunlight struck her, and the view lay spread as of old. The wonderful view of Martinique, its hills, and mountains, its fields of cane, and visions of distant sea.

She paused, as she always paused just here, to feel the trade wind and the warmth of the sun. There lay the mountains she had known from childhood with La Trace, the white highroad, winding away across them, the mornes, the valleys, the glimpse of the distant sea towards Fort de France. It seemed to her that she was looking at all this for the first time. The world, since yesterday, had become new, a spirit, half gay, half sad, had infused itself into everything, the hills, the sea, the distance—the world, since yesterday, would never be the same again to Marie of Morne Rouge.

The last time she had passed along that road, she had travelled without thought, careless as a child, free as a bird—now it was all different. She could not tell in the least what had happened to her, she never connected the change with love, the thing Finotte and Pauline chattered about so

glibly. She only knew that the great old hills were speaking a new language to her and that Distance had become Loneliness.

She had travelled the white highroad many a time alone, yet she had never felt herself alone till to-day.

Then, as she went on her way along the road blazing in the sun and set on either side with palmistes, tree ferns, bushes of grenadilla blossom and sun stricken tamarinds, a voice said to her:

*"Bonjour, mademoiselle."*

There was no one but herself upon the road, nothing moving but the shadows of the palm fronds shaken by the wind and the green lizards slipping across the dust in the sunlight. It was the voice of yesterday.

*"Bonjour, mademoiselle."*

She called it up again and again and made it repeat the words, then she recalled his face as she had seen it when glancing up at him to thank him for the flower.

She had a companion now.

Had you seen her passing, swift, silently, with her burden poised on her head, straight as a palmiste, enveloped in a flame of sunlight, with her luminous eyes gazing straight into the distance before her, you might have fancied her a somnambulist, a person walking in a dream—she was.

As she went on her way, she experienced a new sensation, it was as though St. Pierre had attached itself to her by a thread, the further she went, the tighter did this thread grow—"Come back" said St. Pierre, "every step you take, takes you away from him, come back, you do not know, he is a foreign sailor and may be carried away in one of those mysterious ships, those ships that spread their sails and pass away beyond the blue horizon to be lost forever."

It was up on the Morne du Midi that the voice of St. Pierre said this to her for the first time. She paused. The sun was high and pouring a torrent of light on sea and land.

The sun rays seemed beaten back from the earth, rising in a vague and dazzling spray as the water of a torrent rises in a spray-cloud. The hills were indefinite, blue, and purple shapes, the sea had lost its horizon and seemed part of the sky and the woods of the Morne du Midi were as still as death. Nothing sings or stirs in the West Indian woods when the sun is holding the world like this.

Marie, on the highest summit of the Morne, stood as though the silence of the world had suddenly stricken her, taking away movement and life.

"Ah, if he were to leave St. Pierre! If she were to return and never find him again!"

She had only seen him twice, she had only spoken to him a word, were he to pass out of her life forever, it would be the passing away of a spectre, a mist, a dream, but she would never love again. It was as though she had been waiting for him since the beginning of the world, as though she had lived through the remote past, through the old Carib days, passing from re-incarnation to re-incarnation, through the fervour of tropical days and nights, the silences of the tropical forests, without finding him. And now that she had found him, how would it be with her if she lost him?

Her mind, absolutely virgin and frank as the mind of the prehistoric woman, never paltered with words, she stood there on the morne, gazing at the vision of deathless love, supreme and mysterious happiness, torn by the thought—"Ah, should I lose it!"

There were still miles before her to be travelled before she reached Grande Anse, St. Pierre was calling her back,

all her soul and being craved to return; few women of Europe could have withstood that call of the heart, she had only to return, to wander through the streets, by the harbour, on the Place Bertine, and she would be almost sure to meet him; but she had a trust to fulfil, the goods she was carrying had to be delivered at Grande Anse, Death might have stopped but would not have prevented her in her endeavour to fulfil her trust, and Love was powerless over her in this simple matter as Death.

That was her character drawn in four lines. Capable of immortal passion, yet bound by a simple duty as matter is bound by gravity.

Then she went on her road due east for Grande Anse, past the silent woods, through the great white light of the day.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THEY MEET

GRAND ANSE is just a little town, gone rather to decay, on a cliff forever swept by the sun and the trade wind.

It is the most lonely place in the world and the most quaint.

At St. Pierre, on the west side of the island, the sea is deep and still, morning comes late because of the shadow of the mountains, and the sunset blazes up the streets like a conflagration. The first rays of sunlight touch Grande Anse, morning rushes on the town across great wastes of violet-coloured sea; the dawns are immense here, what you see is the lighting up of a world; on the one side, all the world of ocean quivering and leaping in light, on the other, all the island world. Mountains springing to life against a sky still showing a trace of stars, the cloud turban of Pelée, first a luminous haze like some vast nebula just born, then a burning fleece of gold. Then, just as though the shadows of night were a garment unloosed and let slip, the great mountain undrapes itself and stands a cone of emerald green, a pyramid of colour in the blue and voiceless sky.

St. Pierre is still in shadow, but the whole eastward side of the island is burning in the sun. St. Pierre has its feet in the Caribbean Sea, but Grande Anse is washed by the Atlantic. The south equatorial current and the trade wind keep the shore forever booming with waves.

Marie, as she came along the national road, could hear the sea like the breathing of a vast shell, before the first houses of the town came in sight. She entered the main street, which is a continuation of the road, stopped at the shop of M. Carbet, an old sun-dried Creole trader, who could remember the time when Grande Anse was prosperous with sugar mills and plantations worked under the old regime of slavery. M. Carbet inspected the goods sent him by M. Sartine, loaded the tray with other goods to be returned, and invited the girl to sit down and rest and have some refreshment.

When she had rested herself, having still an hour before she would start on her return to St. Pierre, she left the old man to take his siesta and came out to look at the sea.

Always, when she came to Grande Anse, she would, if she had time, come to the cliff edge to look at the sea.

It is a wonderful sight, for the emerald waves come racing in on a soot-black beach. Nowhere else is there a beach like that or such curious colour effects; white foam, white gulls, blue sea, curving emerald waves, black sand. Over all the sunlight and the boom of the water.

As she stood, the trade wind blowing in her face and fluttering her robe, she saw by the sea edge two white figures, the figure of an old man and a young man.

The old man was M. Seguin, the young man was Gaspard.

M. Seguin, who had a house at Grand Anse and who lived there the greater part of the year, finding the climate much more invigorating and far less rainy than the climate of St. Pierre, had met Gaspard yesterday evening, after having parted with him in the forenoon, and the inspiration came to him to invite his new-found friend to Grande Anse. They had driven over and Gaspard was to return to-day.



And away up on the Morne du Midi, Marie, quite unknowing the interest that Fate was taking in her affairs, had struggled against the impulse to return to St. Pierre. Duty had won its struggle against Love, yet Love had gained his end. It was as though some subtle strategy had been working behind the face of things.

She recognized the two figures instantly, she caught her breath—"It is He!"

Almost as she sighted them, the two men began to turn their steps from the sea edge, and the first thing that struck their eyes was the gem-like figure on the little cliff outlined against the burning blue of the sky.

M. Seguin, despite his sixty years, was as keen-sighted as his companion. He recognized the girl instantly, he had spoken to her often. The prettiest *porteuse* in Martinique had no greater admirer than M. Seguin.

He raised his stick by way of salutation and she on the cliff raised her hand.

Then she waited as the two men came across the black sand of the beach and began to climb the cliff path. She had no false modesty, she did not palter with the truth, the being her soul craved to meet was ascending the cliff path and she waited to meet him, without a tremor or blush or pretence of turning away.

"It is Marie of Morne Rouge, La Petite Marie," said the old man (as if Gaspard did not know), "the prettiest *porteuse* in the island and the best girl—but *tenez*, I will shew her to you."

The sun shewed her to him. The sun had taken her little, perfectly-shaped head between his great golden hands and was raining kisses on her forehead, her face, her neck, her feet; the sea wind was fluting and folding her striped robe, which, caught up at the waist, exposed her perfectly

formed ankles; she might have been a Greek girl on the sea cliffs of Latmos, Troy might still have been a city and Hector a living hero, so far removed from present times did she seem. Only, no Greek girl could have boasted those eyes dark and luminous, eyes that held in their depths some trace of the gloom of the tropic forests.

"Ah, Marie," cried the old man, "petite Marie—see, I have got a friend with me, see, what do you think of him, hey, Marie—? He is the snake-killer, the man who does not fear the *fer de lance*, he saved a man yesterday from the *fer de lance*, yes, and that man was Paul Seguin. Me. Yes, one does not forget that."

The girl was standing, as the old man chattered on, looking up under her arched eyebrows in a most charming way, half evasively, with a half smile; she had met Gaspard with a glance of recognition and now she stood like this, scarcely looking at him, yet still looking at him, scarcely seeming to hear the old man, yet hearing him, smiling at his words, yet seeming to smile through the veil of some mysterious thought.

Gaspard, fascinated, looked at her; she seemed a being elusive, scarcely real; as though she had slipped through some crystal doorway in the air to stand in the blue porch in the sunlight for a moment. Half child, half woman, half spirit, half human being—indeterminate as a dream.

"Oh, thou art pretty—thou art sweet."

He recalled her words spoken to the fleur d'amour.

"Yes," went on the old man, "one does not forget that—a live *fer de lance* with death on the tip of its tongue, and he killed it with his naked hand—give him thy hand. Marie, for the love of Paul Seguin, who knew thy father when he was prosperous and before he fell into the hands of that *fer de lance*, Pierre Sagesse."

She came forward like a child and placed her little hand in the broad palm of Gaspard. Since the day before when she had thanked him with a glance for the flower, she had been filling his thoughts. From the first moment when he met her in the little Place de la Fontaine, she had been filling his thoughts; he was direct in love as in hate, a man without any of the false refinement of society, but he was a man and now, as he held her hand in his, for the first time in his life he felt abashed, timorous as a woman, awkward as a boy.

He had spoken to her bravely enough on the Place du Fort when he had given her the flower, but now it was different, the touch of her hand, the glance of her eyes, filled him with confusion.

She, on the other hand, was calm and confident, and had some observer been present, more keen-eyed than M. Seguin to the delicacies of expression, he would have read in her face something of triumph.

His confusion told her all, told her that she had been in his thoughts, told her of his attitude of mind towards her—It was homage without words.

When he released her hand M. Seguin took him by the arm and they turned from the sea, Marie walking with them in the direction of M. Seguin's house.

It was a low, frame building, the best house in the town, set round with a garden where the tamarinds and the tree ferns all had a bend towards the west as though warped by the eternally blowing trade wind.

"And you are going back to St. Pierre, Marie?" asked the old man when they reached the gate.

"*Oui, Missie.*"

"Walking all the way?"

"*Oui, Missie.*"

"Well, good luck to thee and a safe journey, ah, that I had thy youth and strength—"

He was turning to the gate when Gaspard, with a half glance at the girl, said: "I too, am returning to St. Pierre, would Mademoiselle object to my walking with her on the road; it is a lonely road—"

"You," said the old man, before Marie could speak. "*Mon Dieu*, do you think that you could keep up with a *porteuse*?"

Gaspard glanced at Marie and smiled, shewing his white teeth, the question seemed absurd, contrasting his strong form with the girl's slight figure. Marie was also smiling. Their eyes met for a second.

"I will try—If Mademoiselle does not object to so feeble a companion.

M. Seguin laughed, not without a touch of grim humour, but he offered no further opposition. Instead, he accompanied them to the shop of M. Carbet where the girl had left her tray.

M. Carbet, himself, helped to put it on her head and stood with M. Seguin watching them as they departed.

It was a little after two o'clock and the white national road lay before them, balisiers, palmistes, tamarinds on either side and fields of bending cane. The island before them leaping up to the sky in great bouquets of happy colour, purple and blue and mauve of mountain, black-blues and green of ravine and morne: above all, Pelée, with his turban of cloud. One might have imagined that some giant in play had put gum on Pelée's head and a tuft of cotton wool on the gum.

It was the only cloud in the blue sky, and as they walked, some wind, suddenly born in the upper air, began to play with it so that it seemed to fume and rise like smoke.

It gave them something to talk about. He found it very difficult to follow what she said, speaking as she did, in the *patois* of the island and this difficulty in understanding one another gave them something to laugh about so that soon they were like two good companions almost forgetting, for a moment, the mysterious attraction that had drawn them one towards the other. At times she would seem to forget him, the old mesmerism of the road would seize her, the mesmerism of distance and light, the rock-a-bye of movement; she would hum to herself as though she were alone, once she put words to the tune, it was an old Creole song, simple, and sorrowful; she only sang a few bars and then remembering that her companion was beside her, ceased. She had not forgotten him for a moment, she was singing to him in her mind, but she had half forgotten the fact that he was listening in the flesh.

She was happy, entirely happy. He was beside her. She knew nothing more of love than that, two birds flying forever side by side through the blue sky, that was her dim conception of love, two beings accompanying each other through life just as now, he and she were accompanying each other along the national road, what more could one want?

They passed over mornes and through valleys, following the great white road; they were cutting canes in the fields and the negroes looked after Marie of Morne Rouge accompanied by a man, she had found a mate at last.

They called after her, but what they said was swallowed up, dissolved in the languorous air of afternoon, it seemed like voices coming across the fields of dreamland. A *siffleur de montagne*, singing in the woods of balisier, sent its bell-like notes to follow them.

On the Morne du Midi they paused. The world and the

far off sea swam in a golden haze, the mountains were blue cloud shapes, vague purple cones; nothing was definite but the peak of Pelée, now stripped entirely of cloud and standing shrill in the blue. Then they passed on, following the road as it dipped into the valley and rose again over the Morne d'Avril.

It was now that Gaspard remembered M. Seguin's words: "You can never keep pace with a *porteuse*." The girl beside him, laden though she was with the heavy tray, seemed to move without effort, swift, and silent as a cloud shadow. He was beginning to tire, but he would not give in. "*Mon Dieu*," thought he, "to be outwalked by a girl. I would die first."

To hide his weariness he began to sing. He had a good voice and he sent *The Girls of Avignon* across the cane fields, floating on the warm wind of afternoon, so that the cane cutters paused in their work to listen. Marie had never heard a song like that, though she only half-caught the meaning of the words it seemed to open new vistas before her. This was one of the songs from the land he came from, joyous and strange, far different from the Creole songs that are all set to the same key—Melancholy.

He sang *Jean François de Nantes*, and the topsail-haul chanty of the French merchant service, songs strange as sea gulls amidst these green mornes and waving cane fields.

The sun was well in the west now, casting his light full in their faces, their shadows stretched far back along the white road, the valleys between the mornes were beginning to fill with shadow, shadow that, like some blue luminous fluid, would fill them to the brim, overflow, and flood the mornes, the fields, and the road.

"I would sooner die than give in," that was the real burthen of the songs with which he tried to give himself

heart, his head ached, his limbs ached, he would have given half he possessed to cast himself down amidst the green stuff on the roadside—yet she kept on as fresh as when she started, listening to his songs, chatting, saying things that he only half understood, singing, sometimes, herself, when he ceased—what a girl!—it was as though a man had matched himself against an immortal.

Here and there along the road were shrines to the Virgin and occasionally a fountain fed by one of the innumerable little streams from the hills.

They had passed the Morne de la Croix when, by one of these wayside fountains, his determination to die before giving in left him. There was a green bank by the fountain, huge tree ferns grew above the bank and in the shadow of their fronds the fountain water, escaping from a lion's head carved in stone, sang, and whispered forever to the ferns.

He sat down on the bank and Marie standing before him, saw for the first time the true state of affairs. She took the little flask of *ratifia* which the *porteuse* always carried and a cup from her girdle, put some of the *ratifia* in the cup, filled it with water and gave it to him.

He drank it off. It was like drinking life. Then she pointed to the tray on her head and asked him to help her to remove it.

The *porteuse*, once loaded, cannot remove the heavy tray from her head without help. She dare not bend her neck lest it should be dislocated by the weight.

He rose and helped her, she placed the tray by the road and then sat down on the bank beside him. Ah, how good it was to rest in the cool shadow of the ferns, his tiredness cast from him like a dropped cloak.

He almost forgot that the being beside him was a girl.

It was as if he were sitting beside a good companion after a long journey; after four hours in the stokehold he had often felt the same, resting for a moment with Yves on the engine-room hatch.

Great exertion often leaves the mind clear to perception: the passions, desires, and craving of life are stilled and over the resting body the mind floats clear of perception, lazy, alive to feeling, but half dead to thought.

He took his pipe from his pocket—the same pipe he had been smoking beneath the palm trees that day when Yves, returning from the north of the islet had flung the crabs beside him on the sand—filled it and lit it, whilst Marie, beside him, her hands folded and resting upon her knees, sat, her eyes gazing at the road before her yet seeming not to see it.

These fits of abstraction were characteristic of her, caused perhaps, partly by her business in life, partly by her nature.

It was as though the far off mountains, the blue distances, the visions of remote sea that made her everyday horizon, followed her through life and every now and then closed in around her, separating her for the moment from her fellow beings.

She seemed now to have forgotten the existence of Gaspard, then, a field rat from the canes scuttled across the road and the sight of it brought her back from her reverie, she shuddered, then she gave a little laugh, drew her robe tightly round her, and drew up her little naked feet under her robe.

"Ahn—voici Missie Sagesse—ah, did you see him—more crafty than the *fer de lance*." With head half turned she was watching the grass still vibrating where Missie Sagesse had whisked in.



Gaspard laughed, the great fat field rat—and the West Indian field rat is the cunningest thing in nature, and looks it—did carry with it a suggestion of the Captain.

He had forgotten Sagesse, *La Belle Arlésienne*, and the forthcoming expedition, for the moment.

"Sagesse," said he, "what do you know about Captain Sagesse, little one?"

She cast her eyes up and made a movement with her hand. One of the charming things about her was the way she could speak without speaking, just by a gesture, a glance, she could tell things that would take many words to say. Her up-cast eyes and the movement she made with her hand told the character of the Captain without speech.

She nodded towards the long grass where the rat had disappeared: "He hides amidst the canes, he kills the little birds that cannot yet fly, he comes to the henroosts of the poor people and kills the little chickens—egg-sucker—ahn—of all things the meanest. Once—" said Marie, leaving description for romance "*a fer de lance* bit him."

"Did he die?"

"No, it was the *fer de lance* who died." She laughed. Voltaire, sitting in his study at Ferney had once made the same jest about the man who poisoned the snake. Goldsmith used the same idea with a dog for the chief protagonist of his story. She had never heard of Voltaire or Goldsmith—she just wanted to describe Sagesse.

Then she rose to her feet and pointed to her shadow strewn away down the road, then to the sun nearing the mountain tops. It was time to be going, and Gaspard, rising, helped her to lift the heavy tray to her head.

Already it was cooler, the great haze of afternoon light had faded and distant things were becoming definite, the sun was fast approaching the mountains.

"You know this Sagesse—" said Gaspard as he walked beside her, "well I know him too. I am going with him soon on a voyage."

She stopped and turned, facing him fully. "Going with him—a voyage."

"Not far—I will return."

"Going with him—ah, you are going with him—"

"I will return."

The trouble in her face and voice affected him strangely. He did not know how Sagesse had entered into her life before this, ruining her father, casting a blight on her home. Sagesse was to her like an evil spirit. She had seen his blight on many people, he had blighted her own life once and now his shadow had fallen across her path again, he was taking Gaspard away.

Gaspard took her unresisting hand.

"I have promised to go with him, but I will return."

"Ah, you have promised—"

That was final. With her, a promise once given was binding as a thing accomplished.

"And when?"

"We will not go for some weeks."

He was still holding her hand; as yet they had said no word of love, yet they stood like a pair of lovers about to part, her trouble had communicated itself in some subtle way to him. The very air around them seemed suddenly filled with sadness, it was the light which was beginning to fade.

The sun had half descended behind the mountains, cut in two by the sharp edge of the hills; what remained of him was still furiously alive, palpitating, and seeming to fight against fate; but the valleys between the mornes were now filled with shadow and over-brimming, dusk was rising

like a tide, waves of violet shadow passing over the landscape. Behind them, had they turned to look, they would have seen the ghost of a moon in the lilac of the eastern sky.

St. Pierre would soon be in the full blaze of sunset, there were miles still to be travelled, she gently released her hand, turned, and they passed on. They did not say a word but in that moment of sadness, hand in hand, the future of the one had become a part of the future of the other. He was hers and she was his.

Never had love come to mortals in a more idyllic fashion, speechless, through the fading light, there on the white road with the straight palms for only witness.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### FLOWER OF LIGHT

WHEN they passed through Morne Rouge the last rays of sunset were flaming up the streets of St. Pierre and the light of the moon in her first quarter was beginning to flood the world. They had still some miles to go and now their shadow lay before them, dimly sketched on the road by the strengthening moonlight. At the approach of night the air had become filled with sound. The woods were beginning to awake. The *cabritt bois*, the great beetles that boom amidst the tamarinds, the thousand insects of the night were tuning up, the fireflies were drifting in clouds above the grenadilla blossoms and, now, as though a door had been suddenly shut, night filled the world and the stars the sky. When they reached the turn of the road leading down to St. Pierre Gaspard paused.

Beneath them lay the city sprayed with lights, the bay touched with starlight, and beyond the shadow of the mountains the sea in the light of the moon.

"Tell me," said he, "I must meet you again to-morrow—where shall I meet you, and when?"

She stood for a moment without answering. To-morrow she would have to go to Calabasse far away towards Pelée and beyond Morne Rouge. The eternal labour to which Fate had condemned her gave little time for lovers' meetings. Not for a moment did she think of breaking with her work and taking a holiday; it had become a part of her

life; to cease working, to give up a day just for her own pleasure never occurred to her.

"Here," said she, at last, "an hour before sunset. I will then have returned from Calabasse."

"You will surely be here?"

"Ah!"

The word was less a word than a sigh.

Surely be there?—nothing but death would stop her from being there, mornes, and mountains, endless roads to be travelled by her little feet, heat of day, or storm, nothing overcomable by human heart and will could stop her from being there, and she said it all in that sigh which was half a word.

He took her hand and held it to his lips for a moment. It was their first kiss. Then side by side they began to descend the steep way to the city. It was late for St. Pierre where people went to bed shortly after sundown, the moon was just lifting above the mountains and the sound of the sea came up from the bay, breathing through the empty streets and mixing with the rippling and tinkling of the fountains and water courses.

The Street of the Precipice was filled with moonlight. The old street, to-night, was Romance itself made visible. The heavy-shuttered houses, the coigns of shadow, the causeway of moonlight leading the eye downward to the ghost of a silver sea.

At the entrance to the street she turned and gave him her hand. She did not wish him to come further, Man'm Charles would be sitting up to let her in. She had never been so late before and though she felt no qualms at all at the cause of her lateness she did not wish her aunt to hear her saying good-bye to Gaspard, that would mean explanations. All that day, its blueness, its fragrance, its mys-

tery; the sunlight, and the hills, the distant ocean, the twilight in which her soul had met and touched the soul that had come to find her from far across the sea, all that seemed like some mysterious flower coloured with the colours of earth but immortal as the light of the stars.

Finotte, Florine, Lys, wandering in the fields of youth had plucked roses, lilies, flowers of a moment. She wandering alone, had found this flower of light, deathless, and indestructible. Let the world pass, let the man she loved betray her, let come what might, her flower would never fade.

He watched her as she passed away down the Street of the Precipice, she, whose grace Theocritus might have sung in the warmth of some Sicilian night, and as he watched her, just for a moment, there came upon him, untutored as he was, a breath from long ago. It was as though doors had been flung open to all the songs, the perfumes, and the starlight of all the nights of the past, nights by the Sicilian sea before Taormina had become a desolation, love songs blown across the roses, roses casting their fragrance to the sea and stars.

He saw the little figure, now, away down the street pausing before a house on the right hand side, then it vanished, leaving the Street of the Precipice deserted. He turned homewards, walking slowly; it was still early as Europeans reckon earliness, yet St. Pierre was already asleep. In a French town at this hour the cafés would be still blazing, the streets filled, theatres not yet empty; but St. Pierre, like a child, went to sleep with the dark; hushed by the murmur of the sea below and the woods above, and lit by the fireflies and the stars.

## CHAPTER XXV

### SIMON SERPENTE

He was awakened from sleep next morning by a voice outside his door.

It was the voice of Captain Sagesse. Then a knock came to the door and instantly on the knock it opened and the Captain came into the room.

Gaspard had slept late, it was full morning and the light was strong enough to shew Sagesse's face and its expression. Something was evidently the matter. He shut the door and crossed the room.

"Here's a pretty thing," said Sagesse. "I am betrayed, my affair has been blown on—Have you spoken?"

"Spoken—on what?"

"*Mon Dieu!* What else but the expedition."

"I, never—not a word—at least—"

"Yes?"

"I said to one man that I was going on a voyage with you, but I said nothing of the nature of the voyage."

"Who was the man you spoke to?"

"An old gentleman of the name of Seguin."

"Hell!" cried Sagesse, springing up from the chair on which he had taken his seat. "Seguin. There is only one Seguin on the island—ah, that's where the money is coming from—" He ceased speaking, sat down on the chair again, crushed his panama hat, which he had taken off, between the palms of his hands and stared at the floor with a frown on his forehead and his lips pursed up.

The evening before, Jules, his first mate and henchman, had brought him wind of a rumour that was circulating amidst the drinking bars of the harbour side.

A rumour that Missie Sagesse had discovered the whereabouts of a wreck laden with kegs of gold dollars, that he was going to hunt for it, but would, most likely, fail as another expedition was starting, financed by a man much richer and more powerful than the Captain.

The whole thing had originated with Jules himself who, in his cups, had talked to a coloured woman of the secret which Sagesse had hinted to him. The hatred of the harbour side for Sagesse had supplied the other imaginary expedition.

In reality, nothing was known of any importance. Yet Sagesse, with whom suspicion was almost a disease, was sure that Gaspard had betrayed him. The only thing that made him feel uncertain on the matter was the fact that Gaspard was presumably unacquainted with any rich man capable of working mischief. And now Gaspard had confessed speaking to Seguin on the matter! Seguin, one of the richest men in the island and Sagesse's greatest enemy.

The whole thing was plain.

Another man would have given rein to his temper, accused Gaspard to his face of the imaginary betrayal, come to blows with him.

But that was not the way of Captain Sagesse.

Gaspard was necessary to him as a working partner. If money were found, a white man, single-handed, might have an exceedingly difficult time with the black crew of *La Belle Arlésienne*. He had not time to find another white man to take Gaspard's place, simply because now that the secret was known, the expedition must start as quickly as



possible. No, it would be very impolitic to fight with him now, afterwards—ah, yes, afterwards when the money was salvaged and safe on board the ship, when he had discovered the temper of the crew under treasure-strain, then it would be different. He promised himself some satisfaction then, and promising himself this he unbent his brows and ceased to purse his lips.

"After all," said he, "what does it matter? You say you told nothing to Paul Seguin. I believe you. All the same, he has got wind of the affair, he is going to send a man on the same job—"

"*Tenez*," said Gaspard, "same job, how can he, when nobody knows about the island but you and me?"

"Ah," said Sagesse, "that's the mystery—how indeed? But he knows it and that is enough for me. I start in three days' time."

"Three days!"

"Yes, by working overtime, I'll have the cargo out of the *Belle* day after to-morrow night—"

"*Vé*, but you will want time to get your tackle—"

"Oh, *mon Dieu*," said Sagesse, "Do you think I ever say I'm going to do a thing without having my plans ready made? Come with me and you will see. We can have breakfast somewhere together and talk everything over when I have done my business."

Gaspard got up and dressed and then the two men left the house and walked down the Rue du Morne side by side towards the harbour. Often in his life, Sagesse had been approached on the subject of sunken treasure. The Caribbean and the Atlantic about the Bahamas give a fine field for theoretical treasure-seekers, locations of sunken ships had been brought to him off Rum Cay, off Grand Cayman, off Matanzas. The ships were there right enough only

waiting to be rifled, but Sagesse would have nothing to do with them. He had a profound knowledge of the sea and its trickery. He knew that though the ships were there they were tormented by currents, currents that varied with the ebb and flow so that divers could work only at slack; he knew the power of these currents to heap sand and hide treasure. He had seen the end of a broken deep-sea cable brought up, half a mile of it tied in knots by the mischievous hands of the currents as though some giant had been playing with it.

"When a treasure ship lies a prey to the currents of the sea, there is no use in hunting for treasure or for anything but disappointment," was an axiom with him.

What led him to the present adventure was the fact that the ship was lying in a still lagoon in which diving operations could be conducted as easily as in a lake. She was not sanded up but coralled over, and if there was "stuff" in her a few charges of dynamite would soon lay her open.

The morning was bright over the sea when they reached the harbour side, *La Belle Arlésienne* was lying out on the blue water, the lighters beside her and the cargo coming out to the tune of winch pawls and the chanty of the negroes—

A Fort de France Ay ho!

A Fort de France Ay ho!

Bonjou Doux-Doux,

Ay ho!

A Fort de France,

A Fort de France,

Ay ho!

To southward of *La Belle Arlésienne* a big three-master

was getting up anchor, a cable ship the *Grappler* was tramping the bay taking soundings. The water sinks to a tremendous depth here between Martinique and Dominica and from the *Grappler* away out on the violet blue of the "deeps" came the faint sewing-machine whirr of the Kelvin sounder at work.

*Canotiers* were paddling their tiny cargoes round the steamer from New York that had arrived the evening before and would start at noon; one could see the little *canotiers*, lemon-coloured slips of children standing up and diving for coins flung by the passengers.

It was a picture full of the spirit of morning, full of colour, and light, and movement, the hot wind of the tropics stirring flags and shaking out sail cloth; sea gulls were fishing, flickering snow white in the wind, their querulous cries came across the bay with the clank of the winch pawls, capstan pawls, and anchor chain, and the endless chanty—

A Fort de France Ay ho!

A Fort de France Ay ho!

Bonjou Doux-Doux,

Ay ho!

A Fort de France,

A Fort de France,

Ay ho! .

Faint, musical with distance.

Sagesse, leading the way, they passed along the shore edge to the Place Bertine.

The sunlight was just striking the Place Bertine over the shoulder of Pelée. In the blaze of morning light with the sea and wind shaking the tamarind trees, it formed a

bright picture; women's coloured dresses, turbans of yellow madras, men, some clad in white, some half naked, rolling the sugar hogsheads, laughing, and singing as they worked, all coloured men, from the white Creole to the jet-black negro; children—and you may be sure that wherever there is sugar either in cane or barrel you will find children—playing games, running messages; children black as sloes, yellow as bananas, honey-coloured babies naked as on the day they were born; over all the warm tropic wind blowing lazily, mixing the scent of the sea with the perfume of the land, cigar scent—for even the women are smoking the black Martinique *bouts*;—and the subtle ubiquitous scent of sugar in bulk.

Sagesse led the way across the Place to the row of warehouses and go-downs bordering it on the shore edge. He paused at an archway giving entrance to a big twilight warehouse, peeped into the gloom of the place as if in search of someone or something, and then entered followed by Gaspard.

It was an extraordinary warehouse, this, smelling of tar, sail-cloth, and rope. Piles of rusty chain, cable, old anchors, capstan bars, spars of all sorts, blocks of all sizes lay about, and in the gloom, ropes and remnants of tackle hanging from the beams overhead gave a last touch to the picture. One might have fancied it a cave in which a ship had come to wreck, or several ships for the matter of that.

In the midst of all the rubbish and odds and ends, the owner of the place, Monsieur Jaques, known as Jaques *tout court* by shipmasters from Port of Spain to Port Royal, moved about superintending three men who were engaged with palm and needle patching a sail spread on a vacant space of the floor.

There are some men who, vulture-like, make their living

out of the ruin and dead bones of things, only in that way do they prosper, Jaques was one of these men, though you would never have guessed his vulturous instincts from his appearance which was that of a plump prosperous-looking business man, rather past the prime of life, grey-headed, clean-shaven, always smiling, always calm, always polite, always seeming to yield to your wishes—but iron in driving a bargain.

His business in life was the buying up of old ships and odds and ends of ships for next to nothing, and selling the remains at a profit. If you wanted an anchor or a suit of sails or a spar, he could always supply you. He would buy wrecks even when they were sunken—that is to say, of course, if they were lying in shallow water. He had bought in this way the *Amine-Martell*, lying on the thunderous beach to westward of Grande Anse. The bay in which she was lying was a death trap inaccessible from the sea or from the land, the cliffs were sheer walls of black rock polished and flawless; by lowering men over the cliff edge by ropes he had salvaged thirty-five thousand dollars in gold coin—a profitable business considering the fact that he had paid only two thousand dollars for her as she lay.

From Curaçoa to Porto Rico he had conducted salvage operations, fighting the sea for the pickings of ships, conducting the operations in person when there seemed a chance of good profits on the job.

Sagesse took Monsieur Jaques aside and explained what he wanted whilst Gaspard sat on a spar-end and watched the sail-patchers at work.

"I've got some diving work on hand," said Sagesse. "I want two divers' suits, a pump, everything complete. Have you them, and how much will you charge to hire them for two months?"

"Two thousand dollars deposit and five hundred for the hire," replied Jaques without a moment's hesitation.

"Three hundred and not a cent more."

"My price is five hundred—and if you don't like it I am sorry. I have already been approached by a gentleman on the same subject. I am expecting him here any moment, if he concludes the bargain with me, where else will you get diving apparatus—not in Martinique."

This of course was a lie, but the mind of Sagesse, fogged with suspicion, saw in it a confirmation of the rumour that another expedition was on foot. Jaques, watchful as a bird of prey, saw the effect of his words without understanding entirely the reason.

"Who is this other person, then," said Sagesse. "You can at least tell me his name."

"I never give names in business, Captain, but as you have been my customer up to this, I will whisper something in your ear."

"Yes."

"Well," said Jaques, lowering his voice, "I expect he is a gentleman on the same business as yourself."

"The Devil!" said Sagesse. Then, recollecting himself, he laughed.

"If he is, he's on a business that won't bring him much profit—well, I can't waste any more time, let's see the suits and the apparatus."

Jaques led the way through a door to the back premises, where in a shed were the diving suits, the pump, the air tubes, all nearly new and in good working order. The pump was constructed so that it could be fixed in a boat or be used from on board ship. *La Belle Arlésienne* had a boat that would do for the work to a nicety, she would have to be hauled across the islet and floated in the lagoon. The

busy mind of the captain was arranging all these details as he examined the gear. Then, turning to Jaques:

"Three hundred for the hire and not a cent more."

"Five hundred and not a cent less. Why should I let you have a thing for three hundred which I can hire out to someone else for five—that is not business."

"Four hundred, come, the money down and the deposit."

"Five hundred and not a cent less."

"Four-fifty."

"Why should I defraud myself of fifty dollars?"

"Well, five hundred be it."

"And of course, M. le Capitaine, you will be responsible for any injury to the apparatus."

"There will be no injury—and now that we have concluded business, I'll tell you the name of the man who wanted to cut me out—who wanted to hire these things."

Jaques, pleased with the bargain he had struck, delighted with the success of his ruse, and more delighted with the fact that it was the wily Captain Sagesse who had fallen a victim to his bluff, said nothing, but smiled.

"Shall I tell you?"

"If it pleases you."

"Well, it was Paul Seguin—am I not right?"

"I cannot say—I never tell secrets of business."

"Look here," said Sagesse. "I want this matter put right. You and I have know each other for years. I want the information because I believe I have been betrayed on some business I have in hand. See here, if you whisper the name of the man who came to you about those diving suits, I'll never tell, but I'll be sure in my mind and on my guard, and I'll pay you five dollars for the information."

He took the money from his pocket as he spoke. "You'll not tell—it will be kept entirely between ourselves?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Then give me your ear." Jaques approached his head close to the other's and in a low voice said:

"Paul Seguin."

"Thanks," said Sagesse, handing over the money which Monsieur Jaques pocketed. Five dollars for just a lie was the best bargain he had ever made.

As Sagesse came through the warehouse, he found Gaspard still seated on the spar end watching the sail-patchers at their work. He could have shot him with all the pleasure in life, yet he greeted him cheerily and with a smile.

It is a profound popular mistake to attribute no sense of honour to a scoundrel.

He has the keenest sense of honour—in others. He feels when he is betrayed just as an honourable man feels only, perhaps, more acutely.

"And now that we have finished business," said Jaques, "will you not take some refreshment, you and your friend?" He opened a door leading from the warehouse to a room, half sitting-room, half office, ushered them in, and opening another door, called for coffee, rum, and cigarettes.

In a moment, a servant, bearing a huge tray spread with the ordinary Martinique *petit déjeuner*, entered. Gaspard scarcely heard the entrance of the servant, he was examining a picture hanging on the pine boarding of the wall, a small, old-fashioned wood-engraving that had struck his eye immediately he entered and now held him fascinated as the serpent on the Place du Fort had held old M. Seguin.

It represented a man small and hideous, holding in one hand an immense sword and in the other hand a whip.

He was dressed in a shirt and loose trousers, a broad sash was round his waist and from the sash peeped the butt of a pistol.



The thing was horrible and grotesque. The man's head and face were scarcely larger than the head and face of a child; yet the face had in it the ferocity of a demon; it was of extraordinary breadth across the cheek bones.

The limbs, as far as the clothing allowed them to be seen, were deformed, and as Gaspard stood fascinated and repelled, a shiver ran through him. He had seen this man—this thing—before—where? Impossible to say; in some past life, in some dream—glimpsed, perhaps, in the midst of some crowd, through the fumes of tobacco in some bar—somewhere, at some time in his life, he had seen that hideous head.

More, he felt that the creature, half man, half demon, had entered his life once, bringing evil into it. Yet, wildly searching his memory, he could remember nothing of the circumstance.

"Coffee or cognac?"

Monsieur Jaques was speaking and Gaspard turned from the picture and accepting a cup of coffee and a cigarette, took his seat at the table with the others.

Jaques, a cigar in his mouth and a cup of coffee before him, was deep in trade talk with Sagesse and Gaspard, pretending interest in their conversation, but hearing nothing, gazed round the room, taking in its details.

The walls were decorated with drawings of ships, Carib paddles, gourds, a glass case containing beetles and tarantulas, things of sea and land, but mostly of the sea.

Here was a chart of the Yucatan Straits marked in ink with the soundings of a wreck; beside it a chart of the waters just westward of Nassau where lies a great pond of the sea nearly two hundred miles from north to south surrounded with shoal water and reefs, this chart was marked, too, with the position of a wreck, A battle-lan-

tern that might have lit Van Horne on some night expedition, hung from a staple near the charts, Jaques had picked it up in the sands near San Juan; an old curaçoa flask with a leathern handle, the earliest form of the bottle in which the Dutch exported their liqueur, hung by the lantern. The history of the Caribbean and the Spanish Main lay here in these things and many more, but let his eyes rove as they might, Gaspard could not stop them from returning to the picture that had fascinated him.

Taking advantage of a pause in the conversation between Jaques and Sagesse, Gaspard leaned forward:

"Excuse me, monsieur," said he, pointing to the picture, "but you have a strange portrait on your wall, and the strangest thing about it is that I feel I have seen the gentleman before."

Jaques looked at the picture and laughed. "*Ma foi*," said he, "if you have seen him alive you are older than I am. You have most likely seen him in a print, but not such a good print as that one, it is by Coullier, very old, and I picked it up for a song."

"And the name of the man?"

"It is Simon Serpente."

"Who was he?"

"What! you have never heard of Simon Serpente—ah, but I forgot, you are, no doubt, fresh to the West Indies. Well, monsieur, Simon Serpente was a devil—He was a man all the same—"

Here Sagesse nodded as though he knew all about Simon Serpente.

"But," continued Jaques, "he was all the same a devil. We have had a good many devils in these parts in the old days, but Simon out-Heroded them all. He was one of the last of the pirates and the worst. Kidd, Horne, Single-

ton were not so bad as him. What do you say, Monsieur le Capitaine?"

"O, from all accounts he was a tough man," said Sagesse. "I've never held with these cut-throat scoundrels, if they'd lived in my day I'd have rooted them out if I'd been in power. The government could have done it then, only they were bribed. Don't tell me, the governors in those days grew fat on pirates."

"That is true," said Jaques, "and Serpente kept his head out of the noose more than once by gilding it, all the same, Serpente was feared for himself, they said he was not a man, they said that no one could kill him and that when he departed this life he would have to die by his own hand, people imagined that he brought bad luck to anyone who crossed his path or at whom he looked crookedly."

"All that is women's talk," said Sagesse, "there is no such thing as bad luck—or devil for the matter of that—go on."

"Well," said Jaques, "if there is no such thing as bad luck, at all events, Serpente did not bring good luck and he got such a name for being the Devil himself that he made men frightened of him, even the fellows of his own stamp."

"He'd been pirating for years and he'd made a very large fortune, no one knew where he had hidden it, wind got about that he had an island of his own somewhere in the Caribbean but no one ever tried to find it, for, I tell you quite plainly, that had his treasure been lying on the beach down there, people would have let it lie—"

"Fools," said Sagesse.

"Perhaps so, but, all the same, I doubt if I would have cared to meddle with it myself. People said it was the Devil's treasure and that it was well-guarded—I am not so sure that they were fools either. I know Monsieur le Capi-

taine, you are sceptical on these points, but I have seen bad effects following upon money got by force and blood and inherited. Anyhow, the money of Simon Serpente I would not have touched. Dieu! the things that man was credited with I would not speak of, even before you, and so he went through life till all at once he gave up pirating. It was a most extraordinary ending to his piracy too, for he fell foul of Laropé off Matanzas. Laropé, you must know, was a brother pirate, his ship was the *Golden-Shell*, Serpente's ship was the *Puerto Mexico*, both ships had been chasing a brigantine when Serpente signalled Laropé to haul off, that the prize was his, as he had sighted it first; Laropé refused, and the next thing he knew, was that his maintop mast had been shot away.

"Then, forgetting the brigantine, the two pirates closed. It was off Matanzas and the shore was crowded with people watching, they said that the guns could be heard at Havana, the wind being from the east. The upshot was that Serpente laid the *Puerto Mexico* alongside the *Golden-Shell*, boarded her, put every man to death and hanged Laropé from his own main yard for a pirate.

"Then Serpente, leaving the *Golden-Shell* to float derelict, sailed away in the direction of Cape Sable. He never hoisted the black flag again and the next thing we hear about him is that he turned his ship into a slaver. Turned respectable, so to speak.

"Men no longer feared him so much now. They said that if he was really a devil he would not have turned over a new leaf. They began to remember his crimes and a movement was set on foot against him.

"He heard this, but he did not seem to mind, putting it down most likely, to idle talk, till one day definite news came to him as he was leaving the American coast with a

cargo of slaves that a corvette was out against him and that when he was caught he would be hanged.

"Surely enough, two days out from port, he sighted a corvette and she chased him. The *Puerto Mexico* could give heels to anything in those waters, and by sundown the corvette was only showing her topsails above the horizon and by next dawn she was gone; but Serpente knew that all was over with him in these seas. The Devil had branded him with such a face and form that he could not hope to hide himself, so he perhaps made sail for that island of his where he had placed his treasure—at all events he was never seen again."

"Ah, *Mon Dieu!*" suddenly cried Gaspard. He rose to his feet and went over to the picture on the wall.

Of a sudden it had flashed upon him where he had seen the frame-work of that face, that contorted form—the hideous skull on the island, the bones, could they have been the remains of Simon Serpente?

The thing seemed madly improbable, till across his mind flashed the vision of the pouch and belt, with the initials S. S. on the buckle.

Then he felt, on a sudden, physically ill.

The hideous demon of the picture had, then, entered into his life, he could not doubt that the skeleton was that of Serpente and that the money in the belt was that of Serpente.

And he had warred with Yves over that money and he had killed Yves. For a moment he saw Evil in all its horror and the tenacious clutch which Evil has upon life. To look at this hideous monkey-man was bad enough, but to feel that you were his inheritor, and that, quarrelling over this inheritance, you had killed your friend, was beyond words shocking.

It is so seldom that God gives us an objective view of evil, that the sight when it comes is prodigious and soul-shaking.

Gaspard looked at the picture of the man whose money had soiled his hands. This man, dead long years ago, Anisette, living, but thousands of miles away, these two were of the same brand, belonged to the company of evil, they could touch nothing without tainting it and betraying it to evil, just as they had tainted Gaspard and betrayed him into the hands of Sagesse.

Controlling his emotion, he turned again to the table from which Sagesse was now rising to go.

Monsieur Jaques accompanied them through the storehouse, bade them good-bye, and next moment they were in the brilliant sunshine of the Place Bertine, Sagesse leading the way to the water's edge.

"I am going on board to see how things are getting on," said he, "you had better come with me and help. We can have something to eat aboard and you will want to overhaul your cabin—Hi there, bring your boat along here!"

He called to a longshoreman—a negro, black, and fantastic as a golliwog—who was paddling his boat along the shore edge, the man brought the boat up as directed and they stepped in.

The morning had become utterly windless, and the sea like a mirror. Away out towards Dominica, a becalmed, inter-island schooner lay helpless, the snow-white sails casting a mile-long reflection on the water, the three-master which had been getting her anchor up had scarcely filled her sails when the calm fell, striking the life out of her. St. Pierre, coloured houses and motionless palms, stood fronting the blue, and passionately burning sea. It was the scenery of a most vivid dream, such infinities of colour and

light and silence cast on the mind the unreality of mirage. The very sounds from the city and the shipping in the bay were dream sounds, voices of visionary sailors, murmurs from lotus-land.

Even the old *Belle Arlésienne*, that hag of the ocean, was touched by the magic of the day. Masts and spars and rigging, sun-blistered sides, all were reflected in the mirror of the harbour whilst her copper shewed up through the emerald-tinted shadows of the water; and the southern weeds and strips of fuci growing from the copper waved as if blown by a faint wind.

The cargo was coming out as fast as winches worked by hand could lift it, Jules was overseeing the work and he cast down the ladder for them to come on board. Sagesse when he reached the deck, looked around to see how things were going, then he entered the deck-house followed by Gaspard.

"You'll take the same cabin," said Sagesse, pointing to the dog hole on the starboard side, "I'll tell Jules to get one of the niggers to clear it out for you, there's a lot of old truck there that wants shifting and it will give you more room, you won't have much gear to bring on board, I expect."

"Not much—you say you are starting in three days, to-day is Tuesday—"

"I start on Friday."

"Ah, yes, on Friday—well, it seems to me that is not a very good day to start on."

"*Cordieu!*" cried Sagesse, suddenly shewing irritation, "what sort of old woman's talk is that. What is wrong with Friday?"

Gaspard leaned against a bulkhead with his arms folded, he had scarcely spoken a word since leaving Jaques' store and Sagesse had noticed his silence.

"I do not know what is wrong with Friday, but I do know that with a whole week to choose from, I would choose some other day, especially starting on an expedition of this sort. However, you can choose what day you like. I have only one question to ask you."

"Yes?"

"Will you release me from the business and get someone else to take my place?"

Sagesse rapped out a laugh, took his seat at the table, folded his arms and, leaning over his folded arms, stared at his companion.

He did not speak for a moment. He seemed trying to read Gaspard's innermost thoughts. Then "No," he cried, "a hundred times no, you are part of the business, you gave your word, and now you want to back out—I find this morning my plans betrayed to this cursed Seguin. I say nothing about that; but this I say, you come with me or I will take you along with a member of La Garde Royale, we will hunt for the remains of a gentleman who was killed—we will look for his clothing and his bones. We will—" Sagesse stopped as Gaspard, leaving the bulkhead, took a seat at the table right opposite to him.

"You will do a lot," said Gaspard, "if I take you by the throat and drag you out on deck and fling you into the harbour like the carrion you are. I have given you my word to go with you, on your cursed expedition, and go I will. Let no more be said. You talk of hunting for bones, you will find them. Skelëton Island ought to be the name of that place and if you don't leave your own skeleton there you will be lucky."

"Threats!" cried Sagesse, making as if to rise from the table.

"Threats—I never threaten and I am not threatening you now. I say you will be lucky if you don't leave your



bones behind you for the place is cursed—see you here—”

He leaned across the table facing Sagesse, and, lowering his voice—“See you here, I told you how I fought with a man out there and how, by accident, I killed him; well, I did not tell you all—after he was dead things happened.”

“Yes?”

“Even before he was dead I did not like the place, that ship down in the water seemed to me the devil’s own ship, no one ever saw a ship like that before, she was like an old drowning corpse and then all of a sudden just at sundown, she came to life, lit up as though she were hung with lamps—”

“Phosphorus,” said Sagesse.

“It was not, it was just the light in the sky, God’s good sunlight, but I have never seen such a thing before. Well, what happened next day? I killed my friend, I flung my knife at him, but I did not mean to kill, no, but the devil who lives on that island, took care that the knife did its work. Next day, as I was standing on the reef, looking out for ships, I felt someone standing behind me. There was no one to be seen but there was someone there, the very gulls in that place are not right, *Bon Dieu*, they shout at one—then, in the night someone beat a drum close to my tent—I nearly left my reason behind in that place—well, now, listen, I escaped, I said to myself, ‘never will I go back there,’ look at my luck. I meet you. I take too much rum, I talk to you and shew you that cursed gold, and what’s the result? Well, I’m going back, against my will—”

“To make your fortune against your will,” said Sagesse with a sneer, “and you call that bad luck.”

“Fortune,” cried Gaspard, echoing the sneering tone of

the other, "and you expect to take a fortune from that place?"

"If it is there, I will take it."

"I tell you if it were lying on the beach, you will not take it."

"And who will prevent me?"

"There is one there who will prevent you."

"And who is he?"

"Simon Serpente."

Sagesse looked at his companion as if doubting his reason.

"Simon Serpente."

"Yes, in the last few hours I have discovered whose ship that is lying there in the water, and whose money that was we found in the belt. I told you there was a skeleton by the money; well, see here, the skull wasn't bigger than that." He held his hands together as if clasping lightly the head of a child, "and it was not a right skull, why, I said to Yves, 'Well, he must have been a beauty, the fellow this belonged to,' then the bones were not the bones of an ordinary man, the minute I set eyes on that picture of Serpente, I said to myself, 'I have seen that thing before, but where?' It wasn't till Monsieur Jaques told me his story, that I recognised the truth of the thing and that the skeleton was the skeleton of Serpente."

"Rubbish," replied Sagesse, "you are full up of fo'clse fancies; Serpente—I don't believe myself a quarter I have heard about the chap—you talk like some old Creole woman. If Serpente ever lived, he died in some grog shop, like the rest of his sort, filled with balloon juice; or got knocked on the head in some fight down a back alley—"

"One moment—I shewed you the belt and the pouch which I brought from the island; on the buckle of the belt

two letters were scratched, you examined them yourself—what were they?"

Sagesse started in his chair. He had cast his memory back.

"*Cordieu!*" cried he, "I remember now."

"What were the letters?"

"By my faith, it's strange, S. S. It would be the fellow's initials."

"Just so."

"Simon Serpente."

"Just so."

"You did not scratch those letters yourself?"

Gaspard laughed.

"Did I know at that time anything about Serpente?"

"That is true."

Sagesse's face had flushed, he sat with his fingers drumming on the table and his eyes fixed on his fingers.

He seemed plunged in reverie of an exciting nature, then, suddenly recovering himself, he brought his great fist down with a bang on the table.

"That's luck—one can't doubt—He went to his hive—He'd have been making for Europe, something happened to his ship and sunk it, who knows what, but one may swear that he left his bones close to his money."

Then to Gaspard: "Can't you see?"

"What?"

"The gold, it's there as sure as I am here."

"I am certain of that."

"Then what are you grumbling about, *Mordieu*, you look as though you had lost a fortune instead of having found one."

"Perhaps it would be better to lose a fortune than find

one like that. Have it as you will, though, but at least remember my words if anything should happen."

"And what may they be, those words of yours?" asked Sagesse rising, going to the locker, and pouring himself out a dram.

"Just this, there's a curse on that place as sure as my name is Gaspard Cadillac, and the man who goes hunting there for treasure will find more than he expects."

Sagesse drank off his dram.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### SKELETON ISLAND

THEN Gaspard came on deck. He had spoken his mind and he felt easier. He had tried to dissuade Sagesse from disturbing this resting-place of bones and possible treasure, Sagesse would not be dissuaded, all the same Gaspard felt easier. He had, in plain English, a holy terror of Simon Serpente. His sufferings on the island, his ill-luck in killing Yves and betraying himself to Sagesse, the horrible personality of Serpente and the fact that he had seen and handled his bones just before the tragedy of Yves, all these things combined with superstition to make this monster-man, dead long years ago, a living, and vital personality to Gaspard. He feared him a great deal more than he feared the devil. He was not sure at all that the devil had existence or power over man, but he was sure that Serpente had acted as an excellent substitute for the devil in life and that in death he was still harmful.

For Gaspard the *Ka* of Simon Serpente existed on that island, guarding the bones it had once surrounded and the treasure it had once amassed; in trying to dissuade Sagesse from the expedition, he felt he had propitiated this *Ka*, the wrath of the thing he fancied would fall on Sagesse, and as he leaned on the bulwark rail thinking over the situation and the forthcoming expedition, an unholy curiosity awoke in his mind as to the upshot of the affair.

I doubt if he would have drawn back from it now, even

if he could; curiosity, whose hold upon the superstitious mind is profound, had him in her grip.

"Wait," said Curiosity, "I will show you something strange."

As he gazed across the blue water of the harbour at the coloured town, the palms, the high woods, leaping green against the blue sky, he remembered Marie. Simon Serpente had driven her for a moment from his mind. He was to meet her this evening, two hours before sunset, on the road to Morne Rouge.

Contrasted with his gloomy thoughts, how bright seemed that faithful figure, contrasted with the demon picture of Serpente, how lovely was this form! From where he stood he could see, or thought he could see, the beginning of the road to Morne Rouge, up there where the houses fell away and the palms took the place of buildings.

His heart leaped to the spot.

As he was leaning on the rail and looking, Sagesse came out of the deck-house. The negroes at work on the cargo had knocked off for a spell, boats had come alongside with the wives of the stevedores, bringing their food; each woman had with her a basket covered with a white cloth and each basket was divided into compartments containing fruit, fish—generally *sádines*—and bread.

As the men chattered with their wives, Sagesse and Gaspard went round the decks; the cargo was half out; it was a very light cargo and it was easy to see that *La Belle Arlésienne* would be clear of it and in ballast by Friday morning. Having satisfied himself on this point, Gaspard went to the little cabin that had been allotted to him and began turning out the rubbish with which it was encumbered, old bottles and cigar boxes, bundles of old newspapers, all sorts of useless raffle; when the place was clear,

*déjeuner* was ready, corossoles, chicken and rice, fruit, and the inevitable rum. The negro cook placed the things on the table and retired.

Sagesse was cheerful during the meal, even friendly; never would you have thought that this man had only a short time ago held out threats against his table companion. I doubt, even, if his cheerfulness was assumed or his friendliness false; he had the art, almost a horrible art, of packing away in his mind ill feeling, distrust, suspicion, against a man, keeping them cool and fresh till they were wanted. He was almost certain that Gaspard had betrayed the secret of the island to Seguin, but he shewed nothing of it in his manner, felt, perhaps, nothing of it in his mind, as he enjoyed the excellent food before him and talked of trade, of the cargo, of the customs—and the hundred and one things that are bound up with trade, the tropics, and the sea.

After *déjeuner*, Gaspard lit a pipe and lay down in his cabin for a siesta; he kept the door open for coolness and he could see out beyond the cave-like twilight of the deck-house a glimpse of the sun-smitten deck; then he fell asleep, and when he awoke it was three o'clock.

He turned out of the bunk and came on deck. The winches were still going; Sagesse was nowhere to be seen; Jules, who was superintending the unloading of the cargo, said that Missie Sagesse had gone ashore an hour ago.

He was very friendly, Jules, and anxious to please, and leaving the hands to look after themselves for a moment, he called a shore boat that was hanging about the ship and with his own hands dropped the rope ladder for Gaspard.

In a few minutes the boat had landed Gaspard at the harbour steps; he paid the man, and taking his way up the

Passage Bartine, made for the Rue Victor Hugo. He did not know that one of the boatmen was following him.

As he entered the Rue Victor Hugo he met M. Seguin, who had just returned from Grand Anse; it was one of those accidental meetings that Fate arranges. M. Seguin shook hands with his preserver, then, taking him by the arm, led him across the way to the Café Palmiste.

An hour later, the news was brought to Sagesse that Gaspard had met M. Seguin, evidently by appointment, in the Rue Victor Hugo, and that both men had entered a café.

This confirmation of his suspicions was the only thing wanted to fix in Sagesse's mind the certainty that he was betrayed.

He had no fear of Seguin stealing a march on him, for *La Belle Arlésienne* would be away long before Seguin could commission a ship.

But he swore a frightful oath to be even with Gaspard when the moment arrived—and the place.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE GARDEN OF LOVE

"AND now," said Gaspard, "I must be going."

He had been for half an hour in the Café Palmiste opposite M. Seguin, a cup of coffee, and a box of cigars.

He rose from the table and his companion rose also, accompanying him to the door.

"Well, if you have business, I will not detain you—so you start on Friday? I may see you before you go, anyhow, remember Paul Seguin, who is always your friend, and be careful with that shark of a Sagesse—you say you will be back in a few months' time, well, when you come back, come right over to Grand Anse and we will arrange a future for you, you must not leave the island, you will marry and settle here; I will find you a home and work, not at St. Pierre, but over at Grande Anse where it is cool and where the trade wind is always blowing."

They shook hands and M. Seguin returned to his coffee and his eternal cigars, whilst Gaspard struck up town, taking the Rue Carcenet which was the nearest way to his destination.

Ten minutes later he was at the commencement of the road to Morne Rouge, at the exact spot where on the evening before, he had stood with Marie looking down at the lights of St. Pierre.

He was before his time; the sun would not reach the horizon for two hours and a half, and leaning on the old,

moss-grown, lizard-haunted wall that protected the road to seaward, he looked down at the city, the harbour and the bay.

It was that beneficial moment of the tropic day when, "getting towards evening" the world, released from the ferocious kisses of the vertical sun, breathes again.

The light was still tremendous and triumphant, but the shadows were lengthening, and the old road broken, now, by wall and palm shadows, shadows of tamarind and ceiba, filled with scents of tropical wood life and perfumes from the sea, had regained the poetry robbed from it by the glare of noon.

Ah, that old road to Morne Rouge, trodden by the feet of the *porteuse* and the labourer, the gardeners bringing their fruit to the market of St. Pierre, and the cane cutters with their heavy cane knives making for the fields, how beautiful it seems, viewed across the past. He who has seen from it the city below and the blue enchanted bay, will never see a vision more beautiful—and no man will ever see it more.

And its true beauty, one would imagine, only revealed to a child like Marie, fresh-sighted to the beauty of the world, or a man like Gaspard, made clear-sighted by love.

He flung the cigarette he was smoking away, and, leaning on the wall, looked down at the view, lazily tracing the streets below.

He could see the pale green stripe that indicated the verandahs of the Rue Victor Hugo; the little Place de la Fontaine; the Rue Petit Versailles, and, away below, the tamarinds on the Place Bertine. There lay *La Belle Arlésienne*, a toy ship, and to southward of *La Belle Arlésienne*, fussing along across the bay, the little steamer from Fort de France; the indescribable splendour of the blue beyond lay unruffled by the slightest breeze.

Never was there a more profound calm; towards Dominica where the deep violet of the water proclaimed the great depths, an inter-island schooner lay becalmed like a thing that had made part of the picture forever. And the silence of it all, the coloured city, the painted bay, the illimitable distance! With the help of that majestic silence completing her work, Beauty could do nothing more.

*"Ché!"*

The word half whispered, spoken behind him, broke his reverie and made him turn.

She had come along the road moving soundless as a breeze, she had reached him without his knowing, she scarcely bore a stain or sign of her long journey; straight as a caryatid beneath her burden, it was as if she had carried with her through the long day all the freshness of the dawn.

All day over morne and mountain, from Morne Rouge to Calabasse, through the heat and blinding light, she had followed his image, and she told him so, not with her lips, but with her eyes, cast straight at him under their long, black, upcurving lashes.

The first breath of the evening breeze stirred the fronds of the palms above her, fluted gently her robe of delicately-coloured striped foulard. The western sunlight enveloped her in its flame as she stood like the incarnation of the tropics, the spirit of the western islands, a strophe from the poem of the palm tree, and the azure.

Gaspard took her hands in his and drew her towards him, she shuddered slightly. He would have kissed her but they were not alone, a woman had just turned the bend of the road, and from below, the bells of a mule told of some market gardener coming up by the steep path from the Rue Vauclin.

"You have come."

"Ah, yes—did you not think I would come?"

"O, if I had not thought so I would have flung myself into the sea." (Provençal!)

"You would have cared, then?"

"Sweet—my only care is now for you."

Straight as a flame beneath her load, she listened to him, and as she listened, her gaze seemed to pass beyond him to some happy vision in infinity. She seemed like a child listening for the first time to the voice of Spring. The man holding her hands was quite taken away from the world, it was as though she had led him to some extraordinary height beyond the clouds and was holding him there by the hands lest he should fall.

"Ah, yes, for you, that is all I care—just for you—"

He held her hands to his heart.

A bell bird from the trees beyond the road sent her golden notes floating on the wind, a shadow passed them, it was a woman, a mulatress, old, wrinkled, the picture of age.

Then the mule bells jangled as the mule driven by a negro scrambled from the steep path on to the road and Marie, suddenly, like a person awakening from a dream drew her hands away. Gaspard turned, more people were coming up the steep way from the Rue Vauclin.

"Come," said he, "let us go away from all these people, where is there, here, that we may be quiet, and where you can rest after your journey?"

"Come with me," she said.

She led the way down towards the town, they passed along one of the higher streets and at the door of a heavily-built house, whose green window shutters were drawn against the afternoon sun, she knocked.

A woman opened the door, she was a *calenduse*, a friend of Marie's, and the girl asked her to take her tray to keep till the next morning.

Then, released from her load, she kissed the woman on the cheek, thanked her, and turned to Gaspard.

"Come," she said, and the woman closed the door as they passed away down the road. They passed along by the highest streets and then down a steep way by an old convent wall above which the palms of the convent garden bent to the evening wind. Then, by a path between two great cactus hedges she led him and lo! they were upon the road leading over the Morne de Parnasse and close to the gates of the Jardin des Plantes.

The old garden had drawn her to it at last. Often and often she had passed the gates, glancing in at the trees and the gloom, bright and heedless as a butterfly. One might imagine the spirit of the place watching the girl as she passed, singing, light-hearted, walking alone and content, the spirit which is neither malignant nor benign, the spirit which sets the *siffleur de montagne* singing to his mate, calls flowers into being, sets blossom calling to blossom and bird to bird, one might imagine him casting his spell upon the bright figure, as she passed his gates the other day, and, now, one might have fancied this spirit of nature sighing contentedly in the wind-bent trees—she had obeyed the spell and found a mate.

They passed the gateway and entered a world of twilight and perfume. Palm stems soared away into the gloom above; air shoots of the wild pine, ropes of convolvulus, lianas, festooned and trellised the twilight; gigantic ferns called the eye into glades where orchids hung like birds come to ruin, butterflies caught in some trap of the air.

There was not a sound except the sound of the evening

wind bending the palms and ceibas gently like the caress of a vast hand.

Here they found themselves alone at last.

He took her hands in his; then, releasing them, he held her round the waist whilst their lips met and clung together in an endless kiss.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE FATEFUL LIGHT

WHEN Martinique was a young colony, when Versailles was the palace of a king, away in those sunlit times before the storm of the Revolution, the Jardin des Plantes of St. Pierre was a garden. The most curious and the most beautiful in the world. The spacious imagination that conceived Versailles touched the tropical forest, and the hand that laid out Luciennes fell upon the ceibas, the palmistes and the *loseille bois*. The poetry and perfect beauty of the tropical trees, the splendour of the creeping plants, fathoms of convolvulus, air gardens where orchids swung suspended by the cables of the Liantasse, tree ferns, trumpet flowers, star flowers, all lay there waiting for the gardener, just as in life all the splendour of passion, the beauty of love, and the mystery of death lie waiting for the poet.

He came and the cutlasses sounded amidst the air shoots and the lianas, he destroyed nothing needlessly, pushing the forest back where a path should go, making here a fairy lake—less a lake than a mirror for the tree ferns to see themselves in—here a glade, a twilit home for a statue. He heard the murmur of the waterfall, whose voice still sounds like a voice of mourning for the ruin of his work, and he brought the waterfall into the scheme of things. You can fancy how beautiful it was, this garden in the old day, scented, languorous, sunlit, twilit, filled with the notes of

the bell bird and the *siffleur de montagne*, the whisper of the trees and the voice of the waterfall.

As certainly as there were flowers in that garden there were lovers; men fought and killed one another in the *allée des duels*; what a volume of romance lay here brightly written, vivid in colour, of which remains nothing but a few torn leaves; faded pictures where the forest had half blotted out the garden paths and the glades from which the statues have vanished.

The *fer de lance* hides amidst the leaves and makes the place frightful with death. He is the crowning fascination of the ruined garden.

Gaspard, releasing the lips of the girl, and holding her warm body close to him, kissed her eyes, her forehead, her hair. Beyond the gates, the roadway like a great white lamp burned in the sun trying to pierce the gloom. The world seemed trying to peep at them, and the forest with its great green sleeve to shelter them from the world.

"Come here—here!—here! forget the world and the road—follow me where the ferns are high—into the twilight—come here!—here!"

A *siffleur de montagne* in the gloom of the garden was calling to his mate; they scarcely heard him yet they came, taking a path on the left, a path hemmed on either side by tree ferns and hundred feet soaring palms.

"You love me!"

"*Ché*—I have loved you since the world began."

The reply held all the truth of love.

She had loved him since the world began. Aeons before Martinique saw the white men from the East, in the dawn of time, dim, cometic, her being had been projected towards his, that she might stand in the Jardin des Plantes clasped in the arms of Gaspard a million ancestors had lived and



loved, and died; that he might stand clasping her in his arms a million ancestors had fought the battle of life. This embrace was the victory of the dead over death, the triumph of life over time. In eight words she had spoken the secret which all lovers feel vaguely in the depths of their being. "I have loved you since the world began."

The voice of the waterfall came now through the trees, a burst of light shewed where the palms and angelines, the ferns, and the ceibas, gave place to the lake into which the torrent falls leaping, rainbowed, dim with mist from amidst the foliage of the cliff; a hundred feet of cascading water, every drop a gem. It seemed alive and laughing, if water spirit ever lived she surely lived here. Then, as they stood watching it, just as though the spirit had lost its gaiety, the rainbow dazzle passed away and dimness spread through the glade. The sun was sinking above the treetops.

Marie glanced up.

"Come," she said, "the light is fading—ah, the sun, could he not have waited a little longer! but he waits for no one, not even for us."

It was dark when they reached St. Pierre. The night had welled up from the harbour like a flood, the moon was up, and the stars alight in the dark pansy-blue above, but Pelée's crest still held a touch of sunlight. One might have imagined the day standing there just before flight on that burning crest. Then, spreading wings westward as the light left the summit, leaving Martinique to night and the stars.

All the way along the road from the Jardin des Plantes the great fireflies had waltzed and drifted about them, they had heard the first shuddering of the night wind in the palms, they had paused to listen, the night had told them things beyond the comprehension of all but lovers and

poets. The Creole French of the tropics still held a veil between their minds, yet they understood one another perfectly.

They came by the sea way, the harbour was full of stars and the anchor lights of the ships in the bay, shone like glow-worms, the red port-light of a steamer sent a red ripple of light across the water. They could hear the wash of the little waves against the sea-steps, and from out there somewhere in the starlight the "creak-creak" of oars.

Some shore boat was putting off from a ship.

"See," said Gaspard, "out there, that light near the steamer, that is *La Belle Arlésienne*." He had told her on their way back of how Sagesse had pushed forward the expedition intending to start on Friday. The news had been a blow to her—how hard a blow he did not guess, for in the darkness he did not see the tears in her eyes, or the quivering of her lips.

She looked across the water at the fateful light. It seemed to her sinister, the eye of a *Zombi* staring straight at her, malignant, and threatening.

"I am taking him away," said the light, "beyond the rim of the sea; you have seen the ships go there, great ships that become little ships, and then just specks that vanish utterly, just as people vanish when they die. Remember Ti Finotte; she passed away like that, and the sun remains and the blue sea, and sky, but she has not returned—she will never come back. Yes, I am taking him away. I am the *Zombi* who comes to take away happiness. I change my form as *Zombis* do; you saw me once before, I was then the coffin in which they placed Ti Finotte away there, amidst the blowing palms of Morne Rouge, now I am the light that will take away your love across the wind-blown sea."

She turned to Gaspard, and casting her arms about his

neck, pressing her face to his breast—sobbed. She could keep a brave heart when he told her of his going, she could keep the words back that would tell him of her despair, but she could no longer control her tears. Fate had spoken to her. That mind which knew nothing, knew everything. In days long past, by the blue Caribbean Sea, the women of her remote ancestry had seen their men going away, never, perhaps, to return, and had clasped them like this. Grief, who is ageless, had cast them upon the breasts of their lovers. Just as in her love she had resumed their love, so in her grief she was resuming their sorrow.

There by the starlit harbour of St. Pierre, this girl of the people, clasping this man of the people, formed with him a picture that the patient stars had watched for ages. The story of love and separation told by two forms clinging together—a vision statuesque, eternal.

"But I will come back—and it is not yet—not for some days—"

"You will come back?"

"Ah, believe me, nothing will stop me—nothing—nothing."

"It is so far—I do not know where. If I knew; but the ships go away out there, and it is the distance that takes my heart from me; they fade into nothing, pass into the sky."

"But they come back—you have seen the ships come back?"

His voice told her that he was in trouble, and that it was her grief that caused his trouble. She could not tell whether the ships she had seen going away ever came back, the sailing vessels were all alike to her. The American steamer came back, but it was different from the others, but the trouble in his voice made her dry her eyes and answer him.

"Yes—I had not thought of that, do not mind me, I am foolish—*ché*, thou wilt surely return. The *Bon Dié* will surely send you back to me."

The boat that had been rowing across the harbour was now at the steps near by, and a man was coming up the steps. It was Sagesse. He did not notice them as he walked away towards the town, but they saw him clearly.

Marie shuddered.

"Come," said she, "how late it is—later than I have ever been before, and the house will be closed."

They turned, and by the Passage Bertine sought the Street of the Precipice; there was not a soul to be seen, and the moonlight was now pouring in the city.

The old street looked never more mysterious or beautiful than by this light, brilliant, yet tinged with the suggestion of death, and snow, and dreams. Had you seen Marie standing at the door of the house where she lived, and knocking for admittance, dressed as she was in her robe, light, and graceful as the dress of some Athenian woman, you might have fancied yourself far from the world of our time, in some street of Mycenæ—some moonlit street of Taormina whence the flute-players had just vanished, leaving behind them silence and the vision of Amaryllis at her door.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE SAILING OF LA BELLE ARLÉSIENNE

AT three o'clock on the fateful Friday morning Gaspard was awakened from sleep by a knock at his door.

It was his landlady, Man'm Faly. She had promised to wake him at three, for *La Belle Arlésienne* would cast her moorings and be away at four, if there was wind enough. Mistrusting herself, the old lady had not gone to bed.

When he was dressed she returned with a cup of coffee and a plate with a corrossole on it. She had known many lodgers: mates, engineers from the French steamers, men of all nationality, but she had never known one to please her better than Gaspard. He never grumbled and he had always a kind word. Besides, she knew, as half St. Pierre knew, that Marie of Morne Rouge had found her man at last, and that the man was Gaspard. The oldest woman on earth is not too old to take interest in a love-affair, and Man'm Faly was only sixty.

She stood by whilst he drank his coffee. He had paid her the night before, and his few belongings were packed in a canvas bag which she had found for him.

"Ah! well, the *Bon Dié* knows best, but we would none of us have you go. But you will return, that is certain."

"Oh, yes, I will return—one does not find such a city every day, or such people. But there are storms and chances—"

He took a packet from his pocket. It contained all the

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money he had left from the payment he had received at the shipping-office and the dollars Sagesse had paid him for the gold coins. Though he had remembered the prayers for Yves and paid for them, he had quite a respectable sum left, for living at St. Pierre was very cheap, and Marie had saved him from the vices on which foolish shipmen squander their money.

"—and one never knows what may happen. See here; there is some money in this packet. It is for the little one, should anything happen to me. For Marie, she whom you saw with me yesterday."

"I will keep it," said Man'm Faly.

She took the packet and he took up his bag. He cast his eyes round the room. It was bare and poorly furnished, but he had been happy there; in all his wandering life he had never known such happiness; the pure, simple, clean happiness of childhood.

A minute later, he was in the street.

The Rue du Morne framed with its houses a glimpse of the sea, and the upper half of a great moon just sinking beyond the sea-line.

He had said good-bye to Marie on the evening before. His heart was heavy in him; it seemed to him now, as he came down the steep street to the harbour side, that he was leaving Paradise and leaving it forever. The coloured city of St. Pierre, the pleasant people, the easy life—where would he find a city like that in the whole wide world?

And Marie—

He was standing now on the quay-side by the steps. This was the steps where he had told the boat to meet him at daybreak. It was almost due, for the moon had sunk now completely, and in a moment Pelée would be drawing his silhouette against the ice-blue sky of dawn. The wind

was faint, just a breathing of air. Out there, beyond the shelter of the island, the southeast trades would be blowing, but here there was scarcely wind enough to move a vessel through the water.

As he listened to the wash of the waves against the sea-steps, he heard the steady creaking of oars. It was the boat from *La Belle Arlésienne*.

\* \* \* \* \*

At four o'clock Marie left the house in the street of the Precipice. This was not a working day with her. To-morrow, the day after, the day after that—all time lay before her to work in. To-day, the saddest day in her life, would be a holiday.

As she passed slowly uphill through the awakening city, she could hear the heavy shutters being flung open, voices, the crowing of a cock from far away somewhere towards the Rue Buonaparte.

This morning, away in the blue sky of dawn, the crest of Mont Pelée, touched already by sun-rays, was an extraordinary sight. The cloud turban, tormented by some wind of the higher air, was streaming upwards in tongues of misty light; the great mountain seemed to fume—one might have fancied it topped by a burning cresset, some signal-fire lit by giants or gods.

She reached the Rue Vauclin. It was already nearly day, and the road was filled with people going to work. From the Rue Victor Hugo below the Creole cries of the street-vendors were already sounding; people gave her good-day as she passed them, and she answered them, and kept on.

Five minutes more brought her to the road to Morne Rouge. Here she paused and, leaning on the wall on the seaward side of the road, looked down.

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She was looking at a sight that many people would have crossed the world to see—the bay of St. Pierre unfolding to the most lovely morning that ever came from heaven. She saw nothing but *La Belle Arlésienne*.

The old barquentine had shaken out her canvas and on the strengthening breeze was stealing out to sea like a thief. The bay was still in half twilight, though beyond the bay the sea was alive with the sun.

One might have thought for a moment that *La Belle Arlésienne* was not moving; a moment more, and you would have seen the distance widening between her and the steamer anchored to starboard of her.

The girl shaded her eyes with both her hands; then she cast her arms out as if to clutch back some figure in the air that was leaving her; then, leaning on the wall, she looked.

As the day grew stronger, the vision of *La Belle Arlésienne* grew more remote.

Infinite distance seemed drawing her away, slowly, almost imperceptibly; now a ship, now a tiny boat, now a speck vanishing in the sun-dazzle above the azure.



## CHAPTER XXX

### PEDRO

GASPARD, leaning on the taffrail, watched Martinique dwindling in the sun-blaze and sea-dazzle. Dominica, to eastward, stood vague, and ghostly on the horizon; to westward the sea showed nothing but the purple of an infinite pansy, an ocean of St. Estèphe or Macon blazed upon by the fiercest light of the tropics.

Sagesse was standing by the negro who was at the wheel, and *La Belle Arlésienne* was heading nor' nor'-west on a course that would take her to westward of St. Kitts and past the Virgin Islands. Here Sagesse would steer a west-nor'-west course. It would be a quicker passage than in coming, for they had now with them the South Equatorial current.

Gaspard, as he turned from the taffrail, heard Sagesse give an order for the hands to man the lee braces. They were beyond the shelter of the island now, and the steady blow of the trades was bending *La Belle Arlésienne* over gently, as though a great hand were playing with her. "Now I will capsize you," would sigh the voice to which the hand belonged, speaking with a deep hum through the taut, twanging rigging, whilst *La Belle* would bend like an old coquette to the gentle pressure, till, with a groan of the rudder and a dash of sparkling spray, she would remember herself and come to a more even keel.

Gaspard had noticed the number of the crew when he

came on board; besides Sagesse and Jules there were ten hands, all negroes, large, well set-up men, well fitted for the arduous work before them, with the exception of one, an undersized, shifty-eyed and depressed-looking individual from Porto Rico.

"Ten," said Gaspard to himself, as he counted them. "With Sagesse and Jules that makes twelve, and with me thirteen. Thirteen, and we start on a Friday, and we expect luck!"

"*Regardez*," said Sagesse, ranging up beside him and indicating the crew. "They are not a bad lot; all but that Porto Rican—he is new to me and does not know our ways. We will make a better man of him before the voyage is over. Look how Jules handles them."

After Sagesse, Jules was the ruling spirit on board the barquentine. He had never to repeat an order, and he was a man much more after Gaspard's heart than Sagesse; yet he was tainted by Sagesse and, most evidently his slave.

There was only one other person beside Gaspard on board who did not bend entirely to the eye of the redoubtable Captain, and that was the Porto Rican. This individual obeyed orders in a surly manner, and Sagesse watched him with a brooding eye.

"We will make a better man of him before the voyage is over," said he again, as he turned from the hands who were being dismissed, and stood for a moment looking to windward at the blue ghost of Dominica.

Gaspard said nothing.

He did not even remark on the unlucky number of the crew. He had imbibed the teaching of M. Seguin with regard to Sagesse, and he felt that in this voyage, so filled as it was with the possibilities of wealth, things might happen of a disastrous nature, and that silence and watch-

fulness were essential. He did not in the least know that Sagesse, under the delusion that his plans had been betrayed to M. Seguin, had sworn to be even with him (Gaspard). He knew nothing of this, but something warned him to be silent, civil as possible to this extraordinary man, and on the look-out. On that day, in fact, began a duel of intelligence between these two men, the ending of which none could forecast from the nature of the men themselves.

The expedition had been so rushed that Sagesse felt dissatisfied in his mind as to the stowage and condition of some of the most important gear. The diving-dresses, pumps, tubes and boring instruments were accordingly brought on deck after dinner from the lockers where they had been stowed.

Sagesse, who knew a little of everything, and whose natural genius and commonsense supplied most deficiencies in his knowledge, had the pump taken to pieces and each piece greased thick and wrapped in canvas; the metal parts of the diving-dresses were treated with the same care, only in a different manner; the dresses themselves, the air-tubes, the whole gear down to the least detail came bit by bit under his careful inspection and received as much attention as possible to protect it from the influence of the sea air and the tropical rot that touches all things from metal to morals.

At eight bells (four o'clock) Gaspard, who had retired to his bunk for a doze, was awakened by a cry from the deck. He had left the door of his cabin wide open and the deck-house door being also open, he could see the white, sunlit deck, the figure of Sagesse, the figures of several of the crew and something lying on the deck before Sagesse. He tumbled out of his bunk and came through the deck-house into the sunlight.

Sagesse was holding a belaying-pin in his hand, and the thing on the deck before him was the Porto Rican, Pedro.

The man was covered with blood from a wound in the forehead. He was just raising himself on one hand as Gaspard came on the scene, and he looked dazed, like a person awakening from sleep. Next moment, he was scrambling on to his feet, literally kicked on to them by Sagesse, and making for the fo'cs'le, where he disappeared, followed by a shout of laughter from the men on deck.

"That will teach him," said the Captain, flinging the belaying-pin in the weather scupper and wiping his brow with his coat-sleeve; then, as he turned, he saw Gaspard and started slightly. His face wore an expression of chill ferocity quite new to Gaspard; it was as though the devil in the man had taken possession of his features for a moment—a moment only, for the next he was laughing and himself again.

"Bah!" said he. "I believe the scamp made me lose my temper." He stepped to the weather rail, shaded his eyes and looked over the sea. Dominica had vanished, painted out by distance; a star of light on the far horizon indicated the topsails of a ship hull down beyond the sea-line; nothing else was to be seen.

"We'll see no more land till we touch the Virgins," said Sagesse. "From there to your island, *compère* Gaspard, is, as near as I can make it, three hundred and sixty miles; from here to the Virgins is a matter of two hundred and ninety, so you can add the sums together, and you will know the length of your road."

"What are we doing?"

"Eight knots."

"When will we get there?"

"*Bon Dieu*, how you talk! We are in the hands of the wind."

Gaspard filled his pipe and lit it, Sagesse, leaning against the bulwarks, lit a Martinique *bout* and with his hands in his pockets looked lazily over the sea.

"See here," said Gaspard, after a moment's silence. "Suppose we reach that place all right, and suppose we find stuff there—"

"Yes?"

"Well, how are we to get rid of it?"

Sagesse laughed.

"You are one of those that look far ahead. So am I. Suppose we find stuff there, well, who does it belong to but us? We have located it, we have got an expedition together to find it, the island belongs to no government, the stuff belonged to people who were dead when you and I were born. The stuff belongs to us by all right. Is that not so?"

"As you put it, yes."

"Well, my friend, there is no such thing as Right in this world. As soon as it is known that we have found the old money-box, broken her open and taken the contributions, some government will say, 'That island is mine,' some man will rise up with a lying charter, proving that he bought the island and the ship years ago, some rascal trick will be played by some rascal, and we will have law-suits; the stuff will be impounded, witnesses will be brought from the ends of the world to bear false witness, our characters will be enquired into—" Sagesse laughed as he spoke, crossed the deck to the lee rail, spat into the sea, and returned. "They will say, these lawyer-men, 'who is this Monsieur Sagesse who finds old treasure-ships? Let's hunt up all about him, and if we can't find anything against him, let us make something against him.' No, my friend, I wish to have nothing to do with the law; nothing to do with governments; nothing to do with enemies on this occasion. So,

being a man who looks ahead, I have already made my plans for disposing of the stuff in America—" Sagesse came to a dead stop. His habit of talking had got possession of him and carried him further than he meant to go.

"In America?"

"There, or somewhere else."

At this moment Jules came out of the fo'cs'le, where only a few minutes before Pedro had disappeared, and came along the deck to Sagesse. He spoke a couple of words in an undertone, and Sagesse following him they both went forward.

Gaspard watched them vanishing down the fo'cs'le hatch. The thought that Pedro had been seriously injured crossed his mind for a moment, but his mind, filled with the words of Sagesse, had no room for thoughts about Pedro. America! If they had to go to America to dispose of the stuff, the voyage might last months, and to Gaspard the few hours that had passed since losing sight of Martinique seemed months. He had found all he wanted in life, and he had left it behind him there in Martinique.

As he stood waiting for Sagesse to return and finish the conversation, he saw Marie again just as he had seen her that day on the cliff at Grande Anse, the sea wind fluttering her robe and the sun clasping her little head between his two great golden hands.

Then Sagesse appeared, returning from the fo'cs'le, but he did not seem in a humour to continue the conversation.

He seemed disturbed in his mind about something.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### A FORT DE FRANCE, AY, HO!

THAT night when Gaspard was on deck, smoking a pipe before turning in, he heard the sound of laughter coming from away forward.

There was no light on deck but the light of the binnacle lamp and a glimmer from a crack in the deck-house door which was closed, and out of the darkness away forward came this sudden shock of laughter, not loud, but hard, mirthless, and inhuman.

If a fiend had dropped from the sky and stridden the bowsprit, he might have emitted such a laugh at *La Belle Arlésienne*, her captain, her crew, and her venture before putting his blight upon the vessel and whooping into the sea.

Gaspard glanced at the steersman. He was a big negro, naked to his waist in the hot night, a colossal figure touched by the binnacle light. Whether he heard or whether he did not hear it was impossible to say; he shewed neither sign nor movement, with the exception of the movement of the great right hand upon the wheel spoke, now visible, now fleeting into darkness.

"*Pardieu!*" muttered Gaspard to himself, "the fellow that made that laugh would not make the pleasantest companion. Let us listen—"

He leaned on the bulwark rail.

The hot southeast trade wind coming out of the velvety

darkness whispered in the shrouds and set the reef points pattering, the warm, windy, starry night had a perfume more than the perfume of the sea; some trace of scent from the gardens and forests of Dominica, some hint of the spices of Guadaloupe hung on the skirts of the wind.

Then, all of a sudden, from forward came again the voice, not laughing this time.

*A Fort de France, Ay ho!*

*A Fort de France, Ay ho!*

*Bonjour Doudoux, Ay ho!*

*A Fort de France.*

*A Fort de France,*

*Ay ho!*

The chanty of the negroes when they were breaking the cargo out of *La Belle Arlésienne* sung by that single cracked voice. Now, the negro sailor, or the white, for the matter of that, never sings a working chanty for the pleasure of the thing. Who was this, then, breaking imaginary cargo or tramping at the capstan bars of some visionary vessel?

The deck-house door opened and a burst of light flooded the deck.

Sargesse stood for a moment framed in the doorway. He seemed listening to the voice from forward; then he saw Gaspard and called him to come into the deck-house.

A case bottle of rum was on the table, two glasses, and a pitcher of water; one of the glasses held some rum in it. Sargesse had evidently been drinking by himself. His face had a grey tinge; something had evidently disturbed him.

He shut the door, filled a glass for Gaspard, placed a box of cigars on the table, all without a word; then he took



his seat at the table and began talking of the voyage in the desultory manner of a man who wishes to make conversation.

Now and again, as he talked, he ceased, as if to listen. Now, there was nothing to be heard but the voice of the ship, the creak of block and stanchion, the hundred small tongues by which the vessel speaks. Then, thin and far away, would come the other voice:

*A Fort de France, Ay ho!*

thin, weary, the ghost of a sound.

Gaspard knew now all at once, from Sagesse's manner, that the singer was Pedro, that the man was delirious, probably dying.

But he said nothing. Pedro, what he had seen of him, was a hang-dog looking scoundrel; he did not feel very much interested in his fate, though hating the idea that he had been brutally knocked about. What absorbed his attention now was the manner of Sagesse.

The Captain had filled his glass, finished it, and filled again; he talked incessantly, and the talk seemed to intoxicate him as much as the rum; the more intoxicated he grew the less did he care about the matter which had been on his mind.

Then, at length, he rose to his feet and flung the deck-house door open for air. He stood for a moment in the doorway, as if listening; but there was nothing to hear, for the voice had ceased.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE FO'CS'LE

NEXT day Sagesse shewed signs neither of his intoxication of the past night nor of the worry that had preceded it. Neither did the deck shew sign of Pedro.

Was the man dead, or was he lying in his hammock, recovering from his injuries? It was impossible to say; the faces of the crew told nothing.

The weather was perfect, blue and warm, and *La Belle Arlésienne*, with every rag of canvas set, was making good way.

If a ship could develop a character, one might have fancied *La Belle Arlésienne* infected with the character of Sagesse; at least so it seemed to Gaspard. There was something stealthy and almost underhand in this old tramp of the ocean. He could remember, the first day he sighted her hull down on the horizon, how she had grown upon the skyline, how she had come towards him as he lay drifting in the open boat like an angel to his rescue, and then, the light and wind dying with the sunset, how she had all at once seemed to forget him.

How she had vanished for a moment in the darkness, and then had come stealing along in the starlight.

She was sixty years old, and more, built in Havannah in the early forties; age was telling against her, and it may have been the touch of age, added to the cut of her ill-fitting sails and some trend in her build, that gave her distinc-

tion over other ships. Who knows? But the fact remains that she was a "character," picturesque in any port of the world, and romantic with a suggestion of villainy and deceit.

But to-day she moved with a freedom and youthfulness, as though rejoicing in the depths of her old heart at the business on hand.

At eight bells, four o'clock, there was still no sign of Pedro on deck, nor word about him. Sagesse was nowhere to be seen, the deck-house door was closed, and Gaspard determined on a bold stroke.

He must verify his suspicions. If Pedro had been done to death by Sagesse it was important for him to have first-hand knowledge of the fact, which would be a weapon against this villain should he give trouble in the future.

He went forward, passing the green-painted bell from which one of the crew had just rung out the hour.

Several of the hands were on deck, but not Jules. This man, though he was mate and had a knowledge of navigation sufficient to work the vessel, berthed in the fo'cs'le with the others. He was no doubt there.

Now, the fo'cs'le of a ship is sacred to the hands. It is entered by the ship's officers rarely, and only on extraordinary occasions. Gaspard knew this fact, but the knowledge did not deter him.

He went to the fo'cs'le hatch, and descended the ladder into gloom and a stifling atmosphere.

It was a roomy enough place, as fo'cs'les go, and considering the tonnage of *La Belle Arlésienne*, but all the winds of heaven could never have purged it of the scent of blackbeetles and negroes. The slush lamps that had lit it for sixty years, the tobacco, from Perique to twist, that had been smoked there, the men, from Dagoes to Africans,

who had lived there, all had left a reminiscence, a taint, almost one might say a colour.

Bunks lined the sides; there was only one hammock, it belonged to Jules; only one sea-chest, Jules'; the rest of the crew did not trouble about luggage very much—a knotted handkerchief or an old fish-mat serving them for bags and chests. The bunks ran up to where the heel of the bowsprit came into the place between the knightheads.

There were five men here, all asleep; Jules in his hammock and the four others in bunks; naked, for they had kicked off the last of their clothes in the stifling heat; and looking like bronze figures cast by some fantastic sculptor, fresh from the mould, and flung here and there to cool.

Pedro was not here.

Gaspard carefully verified the fact. The man must have died in the night and been cast overboard like a dog. There could be no doubt of the fact, for on *La Belle Arlésienne* there was no other place where he could be but here, unless he were stowed in the lazarette, in the caboose, in the harness cask or shot down the main hatch. Overboard was a much more tenable supposition. The thing had probably been done before dawn, and as Gaspard recognised the fact and looked around him at these grim figures lost in sleep, his own position on board, should anything bring him into opposition with Sagesse, came before him vividly.

Without clothes, naked, and barbaric, lit by the dim rays of the swinging lamp, here were the men who would give him short shrift and a plunge in the sea at the word of their commander. Pedro was one of themselves, yet they had made no opposition to his murder.

As he stood looking, a man in one of the starboard bunks tossed his arms and moved in his sleep. Gaspard did not wait. A moment later he was on deck. He had been

lucky; the cook who had been in the caboose had not left it, the men on deck, all except the man at the wheel, were lazing in the afternoon sunshine. Three of them were seated with their backs to the after part of the main hatch, chewing tobacco, and yarning; he could see the tops of their heads and hear their voices yaw-yawing, their laughter and an occasional oath; two were leaning over the side of the vessel to leeward, yarning, and spitting into the sea.

The door of the deck-house was still closed. There was no lookout forward, the individual who ought to have been the eyes of the ship was leaning over the rail to leeward.

Discipline in this respect was rather lax on board *La Belle Arlésienne*. She took chances in fine weather; she seemed blind very often, yet she found her way about, rarely making a serious mistake. Gaspard imagined that the crew of this blind and easy-going vessel were unobservant and that his expedition into the fo'cs'le had passed unnoticed. In this he was wrong.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE REVOLVER

THREE days later, in a pink and pearl dawn, they passed the Virgin Islands, their shoals and sand spits.

By eight o'clock the islands were just palms low down on the sea, swimming in an azure haze; they had vanished completely before noon.

Not a word had been said by Sagesse about Pedro, and Gaspard imagined that the captain held off the subject under the impression that he (Gaspard) had forgotten the Porto Rican's existence.

There was something almost uncanny in this vanishing of a man and the utter indifference of all on board. Imagination embroidered upon the situation and asked questions not the less disturbing because they were unanswerable.

Had the wretched man died in his bunk, delirious from brain fever following the injury, or had he been flung overboard before death?

The imaginative mind of Gaspard found much to play with in this idea. He pictured the business done in the small hours of the morning, whilst he was asleep. He dreamed of it at night.

Pedro became an obsession with him, just as the dead Yves had become an obsession on the island. What had happened to this man whom he had seen alive and well, yet who had gone off the ship without a word?

He *knew* that Pedro had been killed by the blow of the

belaying-pin, just as on the island he had known that Yves was dead amidst the bushes; but imagination takes little heed of facts once she gets rein, and incessantly he was haunted by the idea of the vanished man; the chanty he had been singing in his delirium clung like a ghostly echo to the ship.

This trouble of the imagination was not eased by the conditions of his life on board, the absolute idleness and the presence at all times of Sagesse. He was passing swiftly from dislike to hatred of Sagesse.

On this day of their passing the Virgin Islands his ill-temper and irritability had come to a crisis, and it was only by keeping away from his companion that he could hold himself in check. He had been silent at breakfast, but the Captain did not seem to notice his silence. All during the morning he had kept as much as possible to himself, smoking, leaning over the side, watching the indigo-blue water swirling past, the flakes of foam, the flying fish, the sun dazzles, the floating seaweeds. There were tiny fish following *La Belle Arlésienne* close to the rudder, as if for protection; sometimes these would dart away from the ship and back again, needle-bright and swift. A glancing blue and gold form appeared and hovered for a moment in view; beneath it appeared what seemed the trace of a sand-spit, vague, misty, and moving as though to keep pace with the ship. It was a shark, and the blue and gold angel of the sea was its pilot. They vanished. Sharks do not follow nigger ships, they say. Gaspard did not know or care; he watched the depths like a man mesmerised, seeing, scarcely seeing, not caring what he saw. He was thinking of Marie, —Marie of Morne Rouge, from whom this cursed ship was taking him moment by moment further away and against his will.

He was brought back from his thoughts by one bell striking and by the shadow of the cook bearing dinner from the galley to the deck-house.

Canned beef stewed with carrots formed the repast, with the eternal bananas of the tropics. Sagesse was hungry, and therefore silent. Gaspard was silent, but he was not hungry.

The sight of this man, whom he was beginning to loathe, at his food would have taken his appetite away had he possessed one. The meal went on in silence, and Sagesse was pushing his plate away, and had reached out his hand for the bottle to fill his glass, when Gaspard leaned across the table.

"I counted the crew when I came on board," said Gaspard, "and it seems to me that I made a mistake."

"How so?" asked Sagesse, helping himself from the bottle.

"I counted eleven hands which, with you and me, would make thirteen souls on board."

"Well," said Sagesse, helping himself from the glass, "what of that?"

"Thirteen was an unlucky number."

"So you believe in that nonsense?"

"Do not you?"

"No."

"Well, look—what has happened since we started?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"Think!"

Gaspard was working himself up, impulse and imagination were laying their hands on him; he forgot safety, he forgot Marie, he forgot even himself in the anger of his soul before this smooth-faced scoundrel, this cold calculator of chances, this murderer with the soul of a store-keeper.



"Think!—a man has been lost already off this ship."

"Indeed?" said Sagesse, his hand falling from his glass to the pocket of his coat.

"Murdered, *mordieu*!" said the other, who was now white to the lips.

Next moment he had flung himself across the table. He was not a second too soon. Sagesse had drawn a revolver from his pocket; it was a stupid act and unlike him, but his strange character, so antagonistic as a rule to anger and violence, had become infected with the rage of his *vis-a-vis*; he felt, perhaps, that Gaspard in surprising his deed had now a hold upon him, that the crew, bowed by his will as they were, would, if brought before one of those infernal examining magistrates, inevitably break down, contradict each other and give him away. Anger, uppermost in his mind for a second, dictated the attempt to destroy this witness. But Gaspard was too quick for him. He had seized him by the wrist with an iron grip, the muzzle of the revolver was pointing to the roof of the deck-house. The whole thing had happened in a flash, with scarcely a sound, and had you looked in through the door you might have fancied the two men were larking. But a second glance would have shown you that Gaspard, half lying across the table, had seized a knife in his left hand.

"Drop it," said Gaspard, "or, *sang-Dieu*, I will drive this through your heart—assassin!"

Sagesse, whose anger had vanished, released his clutch on the revolver. It fell on the table, and Gaspard, seizing it, resumed his seat.

Sagesse, rising from his, went quietly to the door, which was half open, closed it, and turned to his companion.

"We are fools," he said. "Sit down. I am not coming near you. But to quarrel like this—we are fools!"

"I may be a fool, but I am not a murderer."

Sagesse pointed to the knife that had fallen on the table, and laughed as he re-took his seat.

"Maybe not, but it seems to me you were handy enough with that knife a moment ago. I did not say you were a fool alone; I said we were fools quarrelling in the after-guard, with a crew like this and treasure ahead. The *bon Dieu* only knows if we may not be fighting together for our lives before long, if we are lucky, and if those black beasts choose to rise up against us. Do you know that my position here is not so much the master of a ship as the master of a menagerie? You got the better of me for a moment. I did not intend to shoot you. I drew in anger, I gave way for a second to that child's passion. That was a fault, but I mastered it. But suppose—look you here—suppose one of those animals had come in and found us at grips, and you holding me like that, where would my authority have been? And, I tell you, it is by authority only that you and I will live through this business, for the fellows forward have hell in them, and they only want pricking to let it out.

"You say a man has gone overboard. Well, that is my business, and it is better that one man should go than that we should have our throats cut. That fellow was full of mutiny, and I sent him where he'd got to go sooner or later. That's my business. And now hand me over that revolver. Or stay—" He went to his cabin and came back in a moment with another revolver. He handed it to Gaspard.

"It's loaded. I brought it for you in case we had trouble with these fellows. You can take it now and give me back mine."

Gaspard opened the breech. It was loaded. He handed Sagesse's weapon back to him, and Sagesse put it in his pocket.

"Now," said Sagesse, "let us be friends till this business is over. That is to say, let us work together, for if we do not, we will pull nothing out of the fire—and I can tell you this, we have our work cut out before us."

He held out his hand, and Gaspard took it; but there was no friendship in the grip, only policy.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE VISION OF TREASURE

FROM that day Sagesse's manner changed. One might have fancied that the man's nature had changed; a friendliness and a *bonhomie* never exhibited before appeared in his tone and conversation. Gaspard's simple and somewhat primitive mind rejected the first overtures towards this better understanding; he suspected treachery; but the manner of the captain was so uniformly equable and sustained that the primitive mind could not but fall under its spell.

No man could act friendship like that and keep the acting up, thought Gaspard; and in this he was perhaps right. Sagesse had the power of closing a door on all sorts of passions and hanging the key up; just as a visitor to an hotel hangs the key of his room up, forgetting it; or rather putting it out of his mind till, the business of the day over, he remembers the key and enters his room.

At nights, over rum and water, smoking Martinique cigars, without his coat, seated at the table in his shirt-sleeves like the prosperous landlord of some Provençal auberge, Sagesse would give rein to his tongue and imagination. Treasure, now, was his entire theme, or nearly so.

"Mark you," he would say, "I have been trading in these waters now for thirty years and more, and this is the first treasure-ship business I have taken up, because it is the first time I have seen the chance of profit. Yes, I have

had hundreds of knaves and fools coming to me with 'locations.' *Mordieu*, I have had men bring me 'locations' in five hundred fathom water, in channels where any fool would know the rush of the tide made working impossible, over reefs that a child might guess would saw a ship asunder in six months—but here we have a thing perfectly new, a ship lying in a few fathoms of still water, tucked away safe for us. Of course, she may have been visited and sacked years ago, but I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"For this reason: If she is *Serpente's* ship, she has been lying there a great many years, under water all the time, with water deep enough to prevent salvage unless with diving apparatus, and they hadn't diving apparatus handy in those days. If people had got at her recently, they would have dynamited her. She would not be lying there so quietly, take my word for it, if the Americans or the Spaniards had smelt her out."

"You think she is really *Serpente's* ship?"

"I do."

"Do you think that he was really a man like what Monsieur Jaques made out?"

"Why not?"

"*Ma foi!* why—if he was like what Monsieur Jaques said, he would have been unlike any other man."

"Which he was," replied Sagesse. "Now, look you here. One may listen to old wives' tales by the hour and get no profit, but when one gets an old wife's tale repeated and repeated, and always the same, one may claim there is truth in it. The stories and the pictures of *Serpente* all tally—why, *mordieu*, you yourself have seen his skull, which I hope to find and keep as a curiosity."

"As for me," said Gaspard, "I never want to see the

thing again. I do not care what you say about old wives' tales, but I believe this, that Serpente was the devil in the form of a man—"

"Or a child," laughed Sagesse, "or a monkey, for he wasn't bigger—in his head-piece, anyhow."

"—monkey or child or man, what I have said I have said. He was the devil, or as much of himself as the devil could stuff into such a carcass, and if he lets us off that island with the gold, all I can say is, the devil's dead or gone out of business."

Sagesse laughed and lit another cigar, and turned the subject. He felt a profound contempt for the superstition of Gaspard, but he did not shew it.

On the morning of the seventh day out he came up to

Gaspard, who was sitting on the main hatch, took his seat beside him, and unrolled a small chart.

"We ought to be there to-morrow, shortly after sun-up, if this wind holds," said Sagesse, spreading the chart on his knee. I got this from Jaques; it's a French Admiralty chart of Turks Island and the Caicos, at least a bit of it; the whole thing was as big as a blanket and I cut this piece out. The *Diane*—she was a French cruiser—included our island when she was out here ten years ago taking soundings. She little thought how useful it would be to us."

Gaspard looked at the chart. There was the island, no bigger than a sixpence, the reefs and shoals all carefully mapped out. It gave him a strange sensation to see this picture of the place that for him had the mystery of dreamland attached to it; there were times when he half believed the island to be non-existent and that *La Belle Arlésienne*, sail the blue sea as far as she might, would never raise that landfall. Yet here it was

pictured out by men who had visited the spot ten years before he had landed there.

It had been waiting there all these years for him, to shew him the meaning of desolation and Death, just as the little Place de la Fontaine had been waiting for him to shew him Love.

Ah! those places that wait for us since the time we were born! the places where we part with and meet the people we love, the place where we shall lie down to die!—we never reckon them amidst our friends and enemies; yet what friends are more faithful, what enemies more inexorable?

He looked attentively at the little picture. A hair's-breadth beyond the southern edge he knew that the body of Yves was lying amidst the bay-cedar bushes, in the middle, there, the bones of Serpente, just beyond the northern edge, the ship of coral patient in the green lagoon; that tiny spur to southward was the place where he stood when he first felt the haunting "grue," and from there he had swum to the boat. The sea gulls would still be flying over those reefs to the southeast, calling wheeling, fishing.—

"It's all clear water to westward," said Sagesse. "Ten fathom close in shore; we can anchor there; sandy beach, you told me it was, to southward—are you sure?"

"*Mon Dieu!* Sure! If you had been there, as I was, you would be sure." He had grown so friendly with Sagesse in the last few days that he could talk about intimate things to him, and with southern vehemence he began to paint rapidly in words the horror of that time, lost, locked away by the sea on that spot where the wind and the sun and the silence were conspirators with madness.

Sagesse listened, and never did a man seem more friendly and interested than Captain Pierre Sagesse, as he sat on the main hatch of *La Belle Arlésienne*, listening to the tale of the man whom he had sworn in his heart to be revenged on; but not by the brutal methods of ordinary revenge that would have satisfied an ordinary man.

That night Gaspard did not join Sagesse in his rum-and-water; he smoked his pipe on deck. The moon would not rise till after midnight, and though the stars were unclouded they were paled to insignificance by the sea. *La Belle Arlésienne* seemed sailing through an ocean of liquid phosphorus. The sea burned white, dimly glowing in the distance like a snow-covered country, brightly glowing at the ship's side, and furiously smouldering in the wake; it was the light of dead-wood, of corpse fires, of things rotten, dismal as the light from the lake of Dante where dwell the spirits of the damned.

At ten o'clock Gaspard went to his bunk; Sagesse, with the prospect of a hard day's work on the morrow, was already in his and snoring. The deck was in charge of Jules.

For a long time Gaspard could not sleep, haunted by the thoughts of the morrow. Notwithstanding his hatred of the island and his half-formed resolve to have no share in the treasure, the treasure had already laid ghostly hands upon him. No man can withstand the fascination of the near presence of free gold. Men may be cold to women, to wine, to sin, but gold hidden and to be had for the finding is a magnet for *all* men, even as it was for Gaspard. He had been brooding upon it all day, and now, as he lay in his bunk, it chased away sleep; it made him forget Marie.

It would seem that this fatal island had the power of



casting him from his proper path. Here for the sake of the gold in the belt he had forgotten his brotherhood to Yves, here for the sake of the gold in the ship he was forgetting his love for the woman who loved him.

A week ago he had no thought for the treasure; four days ago he had little thought of it; yesterday it was beginning to haunt his dreams; to-night it had him in its grip. The nearer they came to it, the stronger grew the attraction.

As he lay in his bunk he saw sacks large as corn-sacks bursting with napoleons; he saw jewels such as he had seen in the shop windows of Marseilles; he saw wealth, not as a power to be used, but in its crude form of wealth. And this is how Serpente had seen it, and all these lousy pirates, who, incapable of using gold except in a tavern or a gambling-hell, ransacked the Caribbean, slew men, and with the wealth of the Indies in their pockets found peace at last in a noose.

He fell asleep, only to dream of gold, and he awoke shortly before dawn with a dry mouth and a burning forehead.

He came on deck. Sagesse had relieved Jules and was standing by the man at the wheel. The moon, in her last quarter, held the sea; she was low down on the horizon and the stars above were bright and huge; the wind had fallen to a gentle breathing, just filling the sails which slatted now and then with a sound like the wing of a great bird.

Gaspard spoke a word to Sagesse, and then went forward a bit and leaned on the starboard bulwarks. He lit a pipe. The slow way on the vessel irritated him. What if the wind fell to a dead calm? It seemed almost impossible that this was the man who had fled from the

place that he was now so anxious to reach, the man who had tried to dissuade Sagesse from the venture which now filled his being with fire and anxiety.

He leaned for a while smoking, motionless, in a reverie; then, as if suddenly awakened to some disagreeable fact, he started and smacked his hand on the bulwark.

"Fifteen per cent.! Fifteen francs out of every hundred francs! *Coquin de sort!* never! He thought he had me tied up with Yves in fear of the law. Well, how about Pedro? It seems to me if he threatens me with Yves, I can threaten him with Pedro, and a ship's company to bear witness! Fifty per cent.! I will stick to that. But I will say nothing yet."

Now in the sky to eastward the darkness was paling and stars that were there shining brightly a moment ago had vanished.

Some atmospheric influence had caught the first faintest sunrays and held them from spreading in a fan-shaped haze, grey, then spreading to blue, luminous with fire. Almost before one could say, "It is no longer night," day was coming over the sea like a golden breeze.

"Land ho! Ahoy! Ahee! Land ho!"

Thin, in the French of the colonies, came the cry from the maintop, where Sagesse had stationed a hand.

Gaspard sprang on the bulwark and, clinging with one hand to the ratlines of the mainmast, shaded his eyes with the other hand and looked.

*La Belle Arlésienne* was heading now N.N.W., and there, away on the sky-line, traced as if with a fine brush, the palm tops of Skeleton Island caught his eye. The beach would be visible from the maintop, but from here one could only see the trees as yet.

Gaspard, as he gazed, could hear the voice of Sagesse

giving orders, the clicking of the rudder chains, and then the palms swung slowly out of sight as the vessel altered her course and jib and foresail clouded them.

He dropped on to the deck.

"Well," said Sagesse, coming up, "*La Belle Arlésienne* is not late at the *rendezvous*. She knows her way about, does *La Belle*. We will be at our anchorage in an hour, and then it will be *work*, my brave, for you and me. Come, let us have breakfast. We'll have little enough time for meals once the anchor is down, for I intend to have the boat and gear across that island by sunset; then to-morrow morning the real business will begin."

They passed into the deck-house, where the cook was already laying the table, and were soon seated opposite to one another before a dish of bananas fried with bacon and a can of hot coffee.

They talked as they ate, and laughed. Sagesse, in the highest spirits, sketched out his plan of campaign, and Gaspard could not but admire the thoroughness of the man, for he had forgotten nothing, and had thought out the whole business to the minutest detail. Not only had a boat to be fetched across the island to the lagoon and the pump and gear to fix in the boat, but a shelter had to be built in which to keep the diving-dresses and the perishable rubber connections from the sun when not in use.

"You see," said Sagesse, "this may be a job of weeks, and we must land enough food for the working party right off, so as not to be making journeys to the vessel. There is water, you say?"

"Yes, there is a spring."

"You told me you left a tent."

"A boat sail we made a tent of."

"It will do."

"Listen!" said Gaspard, suddenly turning his head and half rising to his feet.

"Through the open doorway of the deck-house thin, faint, far-away, came a lamentable sound.

It was the crying of gulls.

The men rose from the table and came out on deck.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE LANDING

THE island, close to them now and on the starboard bow, lay burning coral-white and sage-green on the blue sea.

One could see the palms bending to the breeze, and the snow of the surf and the white flicker of the gulls, whose voices came, now and then, weak and spirit-like, across the water.

Something fluttering beneath the palms drew Gaspard's attention; he borrowed Sagesse's glass and looked. It was the remains of the tent, a few rags of canvas; they seemed beckoning to him like brown hands, skeleton-thin and sinister.

Even as he looked, the roar of the anchor-chain through the hawse pipe tore the air, and *La Belle Arlésienne* swung at her moorings in eight fathoms of water a few cable-lengths from the shore.

The barquentine had come in with scarcely a sound, but scarcely had she taken anchorage than Babel broke out on board. The voice of Jules could be heard above the others, ordering the boats to be got ready; stores were being brought on deck, whilst Sagesse, silent beside Gaspard, watched the preparations for landing with a brooding eye, throwing in a command now and then.

The longboat and a quarterboat were lowered and laden with stores and the diving apparatus; it was nearly an hour before the business was complete and Sagesse and

his companion, taking their places in the stern of the longboat, found themselves free of *La Belle Arlésienne* and making for the shore.

They rowed to the southern beach.

"I will take the quarterboat across the island," said Sagesse. "It will be a bit of a job, but she's light enough, and eight of the hands will be able to do it. I'm going to use her for the diving. *Mordieu*, but it's a desolate place, this island of yours. There's no gainsaying that. Who would ever think there was a ship sunk here, and lying in shallow water, too?"

"It's lonely enough," said Gaspard, his eyes fixed on the white beach, the palms, and the grey-green stretch of bay-cedar bushes. Now that he was close in shore, all the elation of the treasure hunt had passed from him, giving place to a feeling of melancholy. Oh, those palms, that rag of tent fluttering in the wind, that scorching splash of sunlight on the beach—what visions of desolation did they not call up! The place seemed to him full of death and tragedy, repellant, as though the shade of Simon Serpente were walking in the sun-blaze of the beach, as though the voices of the gulls were the voices of his men; ghosts of old buccaneers condemned to eternal restlessness and discontent.

But with the grounding of the boat's nose on the sand all this passed away. He flung himself over the side and helped to run her up as far on the beach as the weight of her cargo would let them pull her; the quarterboat was beached just beside her, and then the unlading began.

Whilst it was still in progress Sagesse, leaving Jules to superintend, took Gaspard's arm.

"Come," said he, "let's have a look at her. The tide's half out and she ought to show up well."

"This way," said Gaspard.

He led his companion amidst the bushes, avoiding the spot where he knew, face down amidst the bay cedars, the body of Yves was lying; he dared not even look twice towards the place, and he breathed more freely when they had passed it.

The line he took would also lead them twenty yards or so to westward of the mound beside which Yves had discovered the belt and pouch and the skeleton to which they belonged.

In a few minutes they were free of the bushes and on the northern beach.

The tide was more than half out and the whole of the encircling reef of the lagoon was visible. Gaspard led the way on to the reef, then along it, till he reached the spot opposite the foretop, weed-grown and projecting from the water.

"Look," said he, pointing into the lagoon.

Sagesse without a word, stared down at the vision beneath him.

It was a part of the mystery of the sea that the lagoon water changed in brilliancy and clarity with the tide; with a flooding tide, and at full, its diamond brightness dimmed almost imperceptibly and brightened almost imperceptibly with the ebb. One would not have noticed the fact but for the submerged ship and her crust of coral jewellery; which shewed brighter or dimmer according to the clarity of the water.

Possibly outside the lagoon the sea floor held some clay that misted almost imperceptibly the incoming water—who knows?—but the fact remained that at half-tide of the ebb she was more brilliantly defined than at half-tide of the full—as to-day.

Gaspard, as he stood beside Sagesse, looking also, followed with his eyes the fish-like form and the trend of the bulked-out bulwarks. At the sight of her and the thought of the diving apparatus and all the tackle for salving, the treasure-fever was on him again, hot and strong. *Mordieu!* when she was broken open, what might they not find?

He turned from her to Sagesse, expecting to read his own eagerness in the Captain's face, but the face of Sagesse shewed nothing.

"Well," said Gaspard, "what do you think of her?"

Sagesse did not seem to hear the remark; he seemed plunged in thought.

Then he spat into the water and turned back along the reef to the shore. Gaspard followed him.

"Well, what do you think of her?"

"What do I think? *Ma foi!* I think she was sunk at her moorings."

There was a note of gloom in his tone.

"You think she was not wrecked?"

"She's lying on too even a keel; she's lying by that reef just as a ship would lie if scuttled at her moorings."

"But, see here, if she was moored in that basin, she must have entered it, and there is no opening to admit a ship."

"Not now—but eighty or so years ago there was likely an opening, and that place was a kind of harbour. Serpente would have used that harbour."

"But," said Gaspard, "why should he have scuttled his ship?"

"Ah, why?—who knows? We know he was chased; we know he had a cargo of slaves, and a crew each man of whom was a witness against him. He may have kept a



boat provisioned and moored to the ship's side; then, at night, with a confederate, battened the hatches, main and fo'cs'le, scuttled her, and made for the American coast in the boat—see?"

Sagesse seemed to have worked out the whole question in his dark mind and seemed deeply dissatisfied with the solution arrived at.

"But," said Gaspard, "how about those bones we found, that skull?"

"Oh, the skull! He may have been killed in turn, and robbed of his treasure by his confederate,—who knows? there are a hundred ways of making skulls in a job like that. Only I say this: I lay a hundred to one, if he scuttled his ship, he didn't scuttle her with the money on board."

"Then it's a hundred to one we will find nothing."

"I said it was a hundred to one if he scuttled her the money wasn't on board. I don't know whether he scuttled her or not; I'm only supposing that he did it. No, the chances are not so bad as that, but they aren't as good as I thought. But—"

"Yes?"

"I don't smell money there. It may be stupidity, it may be I don't know what, but when there's money in a thing I seem to know it. I don't seem to feel there is money on that ship."

They were returning not by the path through the bushes, but by the eastern beach. From their left came the crying or the gulls, from their right the cries and shouts of the negroes unlading the last of the boat's cargo.

The diving apparatus was already ashore, under shelter of a sail stretched between two of the palms; the white sand was strewn with packages and boxes. Sagesse, who

thought of everything, was going to run no risks; provisions for three months for the shore party were being landed, for there was always the chance of the vessel being blown off the island and leaving the shore party marooned.

Not only had stores to be landed, but a tent had to be erected to protect them from the sun. This was now being put up.

Two of the crew with cutlasses were slashing a path through the bushes for the men who would have to carry the boat to the lagoon.

As Gaspard and Sagesse watched the busy crowd, Sagesse drew a cigar from his pocket and lit it. Gaspard searched for his pipe in his pocket, found it and filled it; but before he could strike a light a horrible thing happened.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE SKULLS

ONE of the negroes, working amidst the bushes, gave a cry, stooped, picked up something, and held it aloft. It was a skull.

"*Ma foi!*" said Sagesse, taking the arm of Gaspard and leading him towards the spot where the negro stood with the skull still raised in air. "Skeleton Island, as you once called this place, does not seem amiss as a name."

Gaspard, pale to the lips, did not answer. He advanced alongside of Sagesse; he dared not draw back or shew emotion, as the whole of the landing party were trooping around to see what was amidst the bushes. Besides, he had killed Yves accidentally, so he told himself. Why should he falter at the sight of his bones?

But no logic could veil the horror of the thing. To see before you the skull of a man to whom you have talked, with whom you have worked side by side, with whom you have jested, and to know that the skull is your handiwork, your terrible *chef-d'oeuvre*, that but for you it would be clothed in flesh and filled with soul; that is the most tragic sight on which the gaze of man can fall.

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Sagesse, taking the thing from the hands of the negro. "This must then be the skull of the man who landed here with you and whom you left dead—what was his name, do you say?"

"Yves."

"*Ah, oui, Yves—*" He stirred amidst the bushes with his foot. "And here are Monsieur Yves' bones. He has soon become a skeleton, Monsieur Yves, but I have seen a man become a skeleton in the tropics in a week. The crabs, the larvae, the sun, all help in the work." He stooped down and picked up a tobacco-box and a seaman's belt with knife attached.

"Why, what is this? He had not drawn his knife!"

"He had drawn it," said Gaspard, "but I picked it up and put it back in its sheath."

The onlookers knew nothing of the tragedy under these words, or of the veiled accusation in the words of Sagesse; but they noticed that Gaspard was shivering like a man with ague.

"Well," said Sagesse, "we will keep the belt and knife as mementoes of Monsieur Yves. Here, Jules, take them back to the ship with you when you go, and get a spade and dig a hole in the sand for these bones."

He turned away, and the men resumed the work of unlading and storing the provisions and gear. By eight bells, noon, everything was completed; the quarterboat was dragged up high on the beach and ready for carting across the islet, and the hands knocked off for dinner. Sagesse and Gaspard ate apart from the others, under the shade of a sail that had been especially rigged for them and would form their tent at night. The white sand near the bushes shewed traces of having been turned over with a spade where the bones of Yves had been buried. Gaspard saw the place, but he did not mind—the treasure-fever had cast everything else to a distance; things seemed strange that were familiar; he had forgotten Sagesse's disheartening words; his imagination saw the sands covered

with bags of dollars and bullion cases; he laughed as he ate. But Sagesse did not laugh, scarcely spoke, and when the meal was over, drew a cigar from his pocket and lit it.

He was sitting in the shadow of the canvas; the sands and the blue sea lay before him. On the sand just before the tent the palm-top shadows were beginning to crawl—it was one o'clock.

As he sat like this, listening to the chanty of the negroes, who were beginning to haul the boat across the island, of a sudden he made an exclamation and struck his knee with his hand.

An idea had evidently occurred to him. He called to Gaspard, who had risen and was walking up and down on the sand outside.

Gaspard approached.

"Well," said he, "what is it?"

"An idea," said the Captain. "We have come here, but we have not observed etiquette."

"Ah, what do you say?" asked Gaspard, who had heard the word in the course of his life, but did not know the meaning.

"We have not called on the proprietor of the place."

"The proprietor?"

"Simon Serpente."

"Ah! I had forgotten."

Sagesse rose to his feet and took Gaspard's arm.

"Come," said he, "let's go and hunt for the gentleman's remains. It would be curious, at all events, to see them. You know where you saw them last?"

"Perfectly," replied Gaspard, leading the way across the bushes.

The boat was being hauled along on rollers over a path

cut through the bushes, and the pulley-haul chanty of the negroes crossed with the crying of the gulls:

*"A Fort de France. Ay ho!"*

*A Fort de France. Ay ho!"*

and from the gulls, wearily on the wind:

*"Yves—Yves—Yves!"*

"It was near here," said Gaspard.

They had come to the little rise in the ground amidst the bushes, and sure enough his foot, taking its next step forward, struck something hard and hollow.

He bent down and picked it up. It was the skull which was unlike any other skull, either of man or beast.

Sagesse held the thing in his hand for a moment as he glanced round him. At his feet, dimly through the branches of the bay-cedar bushes, he could see the bones of *Serpente* shining white, half revealed, half hidden.

Then, flinging the skull into the air and catching it again, he burst into a fit of laughter. In a trice his depression had vanished.

*"Mordieu!"* said Gaspard, "you seem pleased."

"Perhaps. It is as if this thing had said to me, 'You are wrong. The treasure is on board the ship. Stretch out your hand, my friend, and take it.'"

He cast the skull amidst the bushes and turned to superintend the negroes hauling the boat to the northern beach.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### SAGESSE IS CORNERED

THAT night, as they sat in the tent smoking, Gaspard approached the object of his grievance.

"Look here," he said, "we have got the boat across the island and afloat in the lagoon. We have got the diving apparatus in her ready for working. Nothing remains to be done but start work to-morrow morning."

"Yes."

"Well, before we start work, I have a word to say."

"Yes?"

"It's about the terms of our agreement."

"Yes?"

"I am to have fifteen francs out of every hundred francs you make?"

"Those were the terms."

"Well, it seems to me not enough."

Sagesse gave a short laugh. "How, not enough?"

"Who discovered the ship?"

"Your friend, Yves—so you told me."

"Yes, but as a matter of fact, we both discovered it, for if he had not done so I would have at the first low tide I was over there."

"Well, go on," said Sagesse. "What are you driving at?"

"I say fifteen per cent. is not enough. I want thirty."

"Oh, you want thirty, do you?"

"Yes."

"You want Monsieur Yves' share as well as your own?"

"Exactly."

"That seems to me not unjust," said Sagesse in a meditative tone.

"I would not ask you if it were unjust."

"Yet, it seems to me," said Sagesse, "that the conditions accompanying Monsieur Yves' death make a difference. You killed this man, yet you wish to inherit his share. How about his relations?"

"How about the relations of Pedro, whom you killed?" asked Gaspard.

"Exactly," replied Sagesse. "You have me there, it seems; you have me in a corner, it seems. I have only been twice before in my life held up by obstacles. Now, do you not think it is a dangerous game to play with me, cornering me like that?" Sagesse's voice had a complaining tone, as though they were talking of some trifle.

"Oh," said Gaspard, with a smile, "I am armed." He tapped the pocket where the revolver was.

Sagesse's face took on an expression of disgust, almost.

"Armed! Oh, you are only fit for the stokehold! Do you take me for a knifer or a Chinese hatchet man? Suppose I were to kill you to-night in your sleep, what would happen? Every man on board who knew of it would be my master. I don't kill."

He spoke the truth. Captain Sagesse, though he had killed Pedro accidentally, was no murderer. His art was quite beyond that rough method of settling disputes and gaining money.

"Well," said Gaspard, "kill or not kill, I am not afraid. I am fighting for my rights."



"And your rights you shall have."

"You will give me the thirty per cent.?"

Sagesse nodded his head.

"Right," said Gaspard, holding out his hand.

Sagesse took it.

"And now," said he, "let us forget our differences and have a drink."

He brought out a case-bottle of rum from a corner of the tent and two mugs. They drank together, pledging each other, pledging Fortune, Serpente, the whole world. Then Gaspard, when the carouse had lasted some two hours, lay down on his blanket and tapped his pipe out against his heel. But he could not sleep for a long time, or if he slept, his dreams were so vivid as to be almost real happenings.

Men passed before the tent entrance; they were carrying parcels and packages as though the landing party were returning to the ship. He heard Sagesse's voice and the voice of Jules; he heard laughter and then he heard no more, for slumber had suddenly shut on him like the lid of a box.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE AWAKENING

HE awoke not knowing in the least where he was; then he remembered.

His tongue felt huge in his mouth and his hands seemed the size of pillows. He had felt all this before once, long ago, when a knock-out drop had been put in his drink and he had been shanghaied. It was a frightful sensation, for, added to it was the depression of the rum and the knowledge that he had drunk to excess.

Ah! those nervous temperaments that liquor makes god-like for a moment of illusion, how they suffer face to face with their beastlikeness the morning after!

The wind was blowing—the faintest breath—through the open door of the tent, and the sea lay beyond the beach still and grey.

The sea that yesterday had been blue as sapphire had lost its blueness and beauty and lay grey and still, breaking on the beach in little ripples. The sky above the sea was of a dull zinc colour, darker at the horizon than at the zenith. Gaspard did not remember ever having seen a tropic sky like that, so still in its greyiness, so steadfast, so gloomy.

Through the open door of the tent the wind carried with it the faintest powdering of dust. It irritated his eyes; he looked at his right hand—it was covered with grey dust. This was not sand from the beach; this was dust, volcanic dust, grey and dismal. Some volcano of

the islands was in eruption, some volcano down Martinique way, for the dust was blown from that direction by the southeast trade-wind.

But Gaspard knew nothing of volcanoes or their dust. He lay listening for the voice of Sagesse. He had not yet recognized that a drug had been used against him the night before. He put everything down to the drink, and felt ashamed to face his companion.

He lay listening. Not a sound except a slight pattering and scratching of the palm-fronds as now and then they lifted to the faintest breath of air. Then what breeze there was died utterly away, and complete silence held the island, broken now and then by the far-off crying of the gulls.

He struggled to his feet, cursing the rum he had drunk the night before, and himself for having drunk it. Then he came tottering out on to the beach. The first thing that struck his eye was the empty space where last evening the pile of stores had stood, covered with a sail-cloth. The stores had not been completely removed; a bag of biscuits and a case of canned meat had been left.

His gaze travelled from these to the shore edge, where the longboat ought to have been had the working party been ashore. It was not there. Then, flinging off his shoes and working his way a couple of yards up the stem of a palm, he sought the western anchorage.

*La Belle Arlésienne* was gone.

He came down from the tree shaking and faint, the perspiration running from the palms of his hands and his lips dry as sandstone.

He was marooned. The thing was clear. Sagesse had doctored him the night before with a knock-out drop; he had been "doped," and as he lay unconscious the evasion

had been made. But why? The answer was easy enough to find when one knew the character of *Sagesse*. To leave Gaspard alone on his island, knowing what he had suffered there before, would be a piece of revenge after *Sagesse's* heart; yet Gaspard felt this not to be the solution.

*Why* had *Sagesse* flown like this, leaving the ship of coral in the lagoon untouched? Had he, then, sure knowledge that the treasure was not there, and that time would be wasted in looking for it? Trying to find an answer to the riddle set him, and scarcely knowing where he went, he took the path across the islet along which the quarterboat had been drawn to the lagoon.

Even before he reached the northern beach two things struck his eye; the quarterboat, with all the diving apparatus on board, lay floating in the lagoon and moored to the eastern edge of the basin; and far out at sea *La Belle Arlésienne* with all sail set lay becalmed.

Out there on the desolate grey of the calm sea, her old sails hanging flaccid and without a motion, *La Belle Arlésienne* had an inexpressibly lugubrious and sinister appearance.

It was as though she had been caught in some wicked act and, trying to escape, had been arrested. The calm was holding her in a grip as powerful as the iron grip of ice; the south equatorial current, broken here, would not give her a drift of more than a mile an hour to the north. She might hang in sight of the island for a day or more.

Gaspard, standing on the reef, shook his fist at her and cursed her, and her captain and crew. He remembered the very first day he had seen her, and how, working himself up into a nervous fever of imagination, he

had fancied her passing without seeing him and had cursed her and her captain and her crew.

She had taken him from the island and had brought him back; on board of her he had given himself away to Sagesse under the influence of rum. She had brought him to Martinique, she had given him Marie and the hope of a happy future—and she had taken them away again. She was an evil thing, and he cursed her again as he stared across the sea, not noticing that through the air, upon his clothes, upon the reef, upon the bay-cedar bushes behind him, the almost impalpable grey dust was still falling.

The wind had utterly ceased and a candle would have burnt without a flicker in that motionless air. Gaspard had no idea of the time of day, for the light came through the clouded sky evenly diffused as light comes through a scuttle of ground glass.

He turned his eyes from the distant vessel to the boat floating on the lagoon.

*Why* had Sagesse abandoned the boat and the valuable diving apparatus? Sagesse of all men in the world, Sagesse, who turned over a half-penny twice before he parted with it! The boat and gear were worth a very considerable sum, and here they were—thrown away.

He turned from the beach and began to re-cross the islet.

Halfway across, at the spot where yesterday he had shewn Sagesse the skull of *Serpente*, he stopped dead, flung up his arms, and cried out as though he had been shot.

The little mound beside which Yves had found the bones of *Serpente* and the pouch of gold was no longer there; in its place there was a cavity about six feet long and four wide and five deep.

He saw it all at once in one blinding flash. Serpente's treasure had never been on board that ship. It had been here safely cached, and Serpente had died and left his bones beside it.

It was obvious now; the mound of earth, the ship sunk in the lagoon, the bones bleaching beside the mound; yet he had never seen a glimpse of it at all, whereas Sagesse, at the first sight of the ship, had smelt the truth; Sagesse at sight of the mound had known almost as a fact that the treasure of Serpente lay there. He recalled how Sagesse had laughed as he flung the skull away into the bushes; he recalled how last night he had demanded thirty per cent. of the findings, and how Sagesse had given in and agreed to his demand. Then, while he, Gaspard, drugged and asleep, lay snoring in his tent, Sagesse, with Jules perhaps to help him, came here, dug, found what they sought, collected their men, collected their stores, rowed to *La Belle Arlésienne*, up-anchored, and sailed away north for the American coast.

The blood rushed to Gaspard's face as he thought of this, Sagesse's words, spoken in the café of the Rue Victor Hugo, came back to him. "It is men like you who fill stokeholds." Yes, he belonged to the race of men who cannot see, the inefficient men who fill stokeholds, the men without worldly wisdom and insight, who do the work of the world with their hands, while the sharpers and scoundrels and business men take the profits.

He flung himself on his knees by the hole and looked into it. At the bottom something caught his eye, and, leaping down, he picked it up. It was a coin, heavy, battered, and almost soot-black. He bit it, and the tiny dint of the toothmark showed yellow. It was gold.

He dragged himself up amid the bushes, and with the

coin in his hand stood looking away at the sea, where *La Belle Arlésienne* lay becalmed.

A wild idea occurred to him of trying to reach her with the quarterboat that was lying in the lagoon. Impossible. There were no oars, the heavy diving pump was fixed on board her firmly, he had no tools to remove it with, and even at high tide, when the sea edge of the reef was submerged, he doubted if she could be got across it.

As he stood like this, the sea, which had been breaking in tiny waves, the still grey sea that seemed asleep, suddenly gave a deep sigh.

A glassy roller, stealthy as a thief, had stolen shoreward from the north and broken upon the reef. Gaspard turned his eyes from *La Belle Arlésienne*, caught a glimpse of something in the sky to westward, shaded his eyes and looked.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### DISASTER

A SMOKE-COLOURED band, curious, and like a thin curved cloud, cut the grey background of sky to eastward. It was in motion. Even as he looked it changed subtly in shape till now it became a comet of smoke, head pointing to the island.

Far away to the northeast, another band of smoke, grey and also in motion, caught his eye.

There was something sinister in these apparitions so strange to the eye, so perplexing to the mind, so dismal in colour against the dismal grey of the sky.

What could they be?

The coin he held in his hand was forgotten; unconsciously he put it in his pocket and, folding his arms, looked.

Now the approaching comet of smoke altered again in form, becoming a line definite, distinct, and swiftly approaching like an apparition in a dream.

Ah! what was that—that voice mournful and complaining? In a flash the meaning of the phenomenon was revealed. They were birds. A vast flock of gulls, thousands, beating the air as with one wing, crying aloud as with one voice; then silent, always advancing.

And now the gulls of the island rose clamouring, like a burst of smoke; in a moment the air was filled with birds, in a moment the oncomers had joined the island



birds, in a moment, all rising as if by common consent, the feathered thousands took definite form and encircled the island in a vast moving ring.

The "hush" of their wings sounded like the continuous beating of the sea on the shore.

Gaspard, with head upturned, gazing at the wonderful sight, saw the second flight approaching. It joined the others, circled with them, and then, just as if the moving ring had been bent by a wind, it broke and in two vast flocks the moving host passed away to westward, became clouds again, and slowly vanished, leaving the island to silence and desolation.

There was something tragic in this great migration of birds and in the utter silence that followed their vanishing. There was something disturbing in the absolute peace which had taken the whole world into its keeping.

Close to Gaspard, caught in the branches of the bay-cedar bushes, lay something white. As he turned his eyes from the western horizon, whence the great flock had vanished, his eyes caught this white thing, and he approached it. It was the skull of *Serpente*, thrown away by *Sagesse*, now grinning at the grey sky as though reading there some frightful joke, some diabolical secret of Nature.

Gaspard turned his eyes from this thing to the distant vessel, caught in its flight, arrested and held in bondage by the calm. One might have fancied that the grinning skull drew its mirth from the predicament of *Sagesse*. To Gaspard it seemed that the skull was the centre from which all that silence and desolation of sea and sky radiated, the *quid obscurum* at the heart of that peace which was holding the world in its spell.

He turned to the southern beach and sought the tent.

As he entered it and lay down to rest his aching head, the sea again, moving uneasily, boomed on the reef to northward and sighed on the sand of the southern beach. The unrest, the unhappiness that lives in the heart of things, seemed to speak in that voice.

He turned as he lay and cast himself face downwards with arms outstretched. Tricked, betrayed, marooned, robbed of the gold for which he had forgotten her, he remembered now Marie. Sagesse, the treasure, *La Belle Arlésienne*, all that trash vanished from his mind for a moment before the vision of the thing he loved.

Had there been the slightest chance of outwitting Sagesse, of regaining his hold upon the treasure, the fever for revenge and gold would have held his mind from all else; but he recognized that the game was lost, and in his desolation he turned to his only thought of comfort. And here again the game was lost. Love had tricked him just as fortune had tricked him, and just as cruelly.

To find Marie again he must first find Martinique. Suppose, even, that a ship were to rescue him; that ship might be bound for any port in the world but Martinique. He had no money, no trade. To gain enough to return to St. Pierre he would have to go back to the stokehold, he would have to work ships across and across the world before his wretched pay, saved and scraped together, would give him money sufficient to return with. He might write to M. Seguin, but where in his wandering life would he get the reply?

It might be months before a ship rescued him; it might be months before that ship landed him at a port where he could get work; it might be years before he reached Martinique—and meanwhile, what of Marie? Ah! the want of money, just a little of that money which the rich find so

burdensome, that want is the curse of the poor, that want is the essence of the true tragedy of life.

The hunger which poverty imposes on man is nothing to the loneliness and the separation, the heart-break and the starvation for want of love.

He loved Marie now, with the love that comes after marriage, the love that has nothing to do with passion. Across separation and disaster he saw her as she really was, beautiful, single-hearted, loving, and faithful—and he might never meet her again. To reach her he would have to journey to all parts of the world, working as a slave in a stokehold with that ache in his heart, earning *sou* by *sou*, the money that would bring him to her—and every moment of separation seemed a year.

Stung suddenly to madness, with the tears upon his face, he left the tent and sought the beach outside, walking up and down it like a frenzied creature, cursing, calling out, wild with the petty things that had him in their grip, the little Fates that had bound him to this islet as the Lilliputians bound Gulliver. He saw nothing of his own handiwork in this fate which he cursed; he saw nothing of the grave faults of mind, the weaknesses, the impetuositities that had flawed his life, killing Yves, and binding him to the will of Sagesse; he only saw his Fate and that it was horrid—and he cursed it.

After awhile he paused. A wind had risen and was blowing from the north across the islet. He recognised that the day had grown suddenly darker and as he stood wiping the sweat from his brow, confused, and exhausted with the conflict of thought through which he had passed, he heard a noise, faint, far away, and indeterminate. It came from the north with the wind that was now increasing in force. He glanced round at the sky. All the north-

ern sky was dusky, like hot bronze; it had a solid look, and even as he gazed some wind of the higher atmosphere set to work compacting the upper part of this dark zone, ruling it level in one infinite line. Added to the darkness of the coming storm was the dusk of evening. The drug must have held him in its spell much longer than he had thought.

Next moment Gaspard was making across the islet to the northern beach; when he reached it he stopped, shaded his eyes with both hands, and looked.

*La Belle Arlésienne* had got the wind at last. She shewed as if sketched in grey chalk against the great black wall that the coming storm had built across the world. Heavens! what a sight was that wall! It seemed built by plumb-line and square, titanic, immeasurable.

And from behind it came that sound, growing momentarily more definite, as though all the hosts of darkness were murmuring together, wild to break through some hidden door and burst upon the world.

Against this prodigious menace *La Belle Arlésienne* was moving, steering N.N.East on the starboard tack. *Sagesse* had taken in sail, but in the face of what was coming, not enough, to a sailor's eye. But no one knew better than *Sagesse* that all to southward of him the sea was full of death, in the form of rocks and shoals; to make an offing was imperative.

Now the wind was coming in gusts, whipping the foam over the reef, and the spray in the face of Gaspard, and before the wind the league-long waves were racing shoreward.

As he looked, as he listened, the great wall seemed gradually to bend from the top and over it came the rushing wind, and with the wind the first note of thunder, pro-

found, funereal, and dreamy; less like thunder than the muffle of muffled drums.

At this moment the setting sun, pale like an appalled spectator, glanced through the clouds, lit the sea, *La Belle Arlésienne* and the advancing wall of storm. It was no longer a wall; it had become concave, in the form of a breaking wave, and the wave became veiled with mist, and *La Belle Arlésienne* blotted out behind the roaring rain.

Dominating the thunder, the wind, the howling of the storm, the voice of the rain tore the air as it washed over the sea and then over the islet, wave-like and solid almost as a wave. It cast Gaspard down like a great hand and held him half drowned; it released him for half a second and before he could struggle to his feet the wind hit him and drove him like a rag amidst the bushes, and the sand of the beach rushed over him, not as sand but slush, half choking him. He thought the waves of the sea were upon him, but there were now no waves on the sea, which was as smooth beneath the wind as a new planed board, and as white as driven snow.

On his face, now, struggling to rise, he could not; it was as though a great sheet of iron held him down, and with the first real crash of thunder, prone on his face, he felt the earth splitting under him and shouted to the mud beneath him, "The world is gone—the world is gone!" But the world held fast though now, blow after blow, the gods seemed smashing at it with mighty hammers, sickening concussions, jets of light, deafness, blackness, misery, and the iron hand of the wind, all had fallen upon the world, rending thought to pieces. It could have lasted but a minute, this first desperate onslaught of the hurricane, yet to Gaspard it seemed that time had been torn away by the wind, that he had known eternity.

Now, released partly from the grip of that hateful hand which had pressed him nearly to death, he struggled to his knees and crawled further amidst the bushes where they were thickest; here there was shelter of a sort, the bushes low-growing and firm-rooted made a bulwark against the wind and the spindrift rushing across the island like blown white sheets. Again and again the yelling blackness would be lit by the lightning and the whirling spirals and blankets of spray above shown up only to vanish in the roaring darkness where the world seemed fighting for its life with chaos.

Then came stupor; like a man half under the influence of chloroform the man amidst the bushes, deafened, and blinded and stupefied by the torment around him, saw visions, and dreamt dreams in which the blinding lightning flashes lit blue seas and the voice of the wind was the voices of people.

How long he lay like this it would be impossible to say before raising himself on his elbow, he returned fully to consciousness.

The great fury of the hurricane had passed; it was still blowing hard and strong, but the worst was over and the moon was lighting the world through the rushing clouds. He rose to his feet, but fell on his knees again immediately. He had eaten nothing during the past twenty-four hours, and the drug was still weakening him; but in the moment of rising he had seen a sight surpassing in terror even the fury of the hurricane, and now amidst the bushes, on hands and knees, motionless and petrified by the drama before him, he looked.

*La Belle Arlésienne* was coming ashore, now uplifted on the crest of a wave, now vanishing in a hollow, dismasted all but for the stump of the foremast, from which a rag of

canvas was wildly flying. *La Belle Arlésienne* was being driven to the lagoon by the merciless whip of the wind.

The hag of the sea had found her master at last; stealth and cunning could not save her now, nor trickery, nor subterfuge. She had flung them all away. Like some witch who had worked evil long in silence, dragged at last shrieking to the gallows, the old barquentine seemed fighting against her fate.

Her fluttering rags of canvas seemed clawing at the wind; she screamed, and Gaspard on his knees could hear her screams in the high-pitched wailing of her crew, the shrill pig-like screaming of negroes hurled and huddled together, animals waiting for inevitable death.

A moment he saw her held up strong in the moonlight on the crest of a vast wave; then a cloud drew a skirt of shadow over her and when the moon broke through again she was gone, deep in the pocket of the lagoon, over which the thirty-foot waves were rushing shoreward.

## CHAPTER XL

### THE PASSING OF SAGESSE

HE must have fallen asleep as he knelt, for when he regained consciousness he had no memory of having lain down. Yet he was lying on his side amidst the bushes, the day was broad, the sun shining, the sky without a cloud, though still swept by the rushing wind.

He remembered all that had passed clearly and distinctly and the miracle of that blue sky above him, after the black and howling chaos of the night, filled his heart with thankfulness untold.

He rose to his feet. His clothes were stiff with sea-salt, his eyes half-blinded by the light. Then he cried out in astonishment. The island, under the sun, and surrounded by the racing amethyst of the sea, lay glittering white as frost. It was sea-salt from the spray of the night before. The palm trees were no longer there. There was nothing to be seen but the winter-white bushes beneath the burning sun. Bodies were washing ashore on the beach close to him, but he scarcely glanced at them, the desolation before him held him motionless and the knowledge that everything was blown away, provisions, tent, everything!

He crossed to the southern beach. There lay the palms, snapped off and dashed into the sand; a little mound just by the sea edge drew him towards it; it was the case of provisions. Hurlled along by the wind, it had struck a lump of coral and been sanded over; it had been shaken



almost to pieces and a few blows with his heel burst the staves apart. It was packed with tins of American preserved meat, such as are exported especially to the West Indies. He haggled a tin open with his knife and set to on its contents. As he ate he saw something tangled in the fronds of one of the broken palms. He came to it, kicked the sand aside and found the bag of biscuit. Things were not, then, so bad; but his mind was so dazed and benumbed that he scarcely felt satisfaction at the sight of the food and the knowledge that for a time, at least, he was saved from starvation. He stood chewing the meat and gazing about him, as an animal might gaze on finding itself in a strange place.

Ever since his first landing upon it with Yves, the island had seemed possessed of some diabolical presence. Yet on looking back, there was nothing to be perceived but just an ordinary and logical chain of events. With the exception of finding the gold and the coral ship in the lagoon, all the events, even the killing of Yves, came within the province of ordinary sequence. Yet how sinister were they, taken as a whole, from the first glimpse of the ship in the water to the last glimpse of *La Belle Arlésienne* hurled to her death by the waves.

He was thinking nothing of this as he stood chewing the food and gazing about him. The satisfaction of his hunger was all that troubled him for the moment; then he sought the little spring amidst the bushes, and drank.

He had not eaten for more than twenty-four hours, and now the food he had taken made him feel drowsy, heavy with weariness. He came to the blown-down palms, made what shelter he could from the sun with their fronds, lay down beside them and fell asleep.

When he awoke some hours later, his mind was clear

and his first thought was of Sagesse. So strange a thing is the human mind that here, cast away, marooned on this desolate spot without a tent to shelter him or a soul to share his loneliness, his first sensation on fully regaining his faculties was one of triumph. Sagesse had gone under, that hateful mind, perfidious and dark, would trouble him no more. He was revenged. He rose to his feet and shook the sand from his clothes. The wind was still blowing strong, but the sea had fallen. The gulls had not returned, and the only sounds in all that blue and breezy world were the sounds of the wind and the breaking waves. The frost-white glitter of the bay-cedar bushes lent an extra touch of brilliancy to the scene. Never had he seen the island like this, sea-dashed and wind-blown, surrounded with tumultuous life.

He crossed over to the northern beach. He wished to see what he could of the wreck, but even before he was half way across he could see that nothing remained of *La Belle Arlésienne* but a few spars washing about in the lagoon water, where ship of wood and ship of coral lay locked together in ruin.

But things were washing ashore on the full tide—black things to make one shudder, forms with limbs outspread, looking like enormous jet-black starfish, forms locked together in a deadly embrace as though they had gone to their death fighting.

Then as Gaspard stepped from the bushes he saw with a thrill of horror that the sands were in motion. Thousands upon thousands of little crabs were congregating to the feast; he trod on them as he walked, and amidst them, like moving rocks, giant crabs from the eastern beach were advancing like captains of this army of destruction.

He would have fled the hateful place had he not noticed

a form that the sea had cast up almost free of the waves.

It was the body of Sagesse.

The man of wisdom and resource lay on his side, huddled up as if asleep. He was fully dressed. Horrible though the place was and dreadful with death, not all the horror in the world could have prevented Gaspard from advancing towards the body of Sagesse. It drew him towards it against his will, as if by some mesmeric influence.

The right hand of the Captain lying across his chest had upon one of the fingers something that glittered in the sun like a star. It was a diamond, enormous and lovely with light, set in an old-fashioned ring. It would have graced the crown of an emperor; it would have held Gaspard fascinated had not another object held him breathless. From the muffler around the neck of Sagesse protruded the head of a snake. Two bright red burning eyes flashed in the sun, the thing seemed furious at being disturbed; a moment more and one would have expected it to wriggle from its concealment and strike, but Gaspard feared it less even than he had feared the *fer de lance* of the Place du Fort. He knelt down beside Sagesse, heedless of the crabs now surrounding him, removed the muffler from his neck and then removed the snake. It was of solid gold, flexible, one of those antique bracelets made to wind round and cling to a woman's arm. The flat portion of the head was formed by a quadrille of flat sapphires, the eyes were pigeon-blood rubies. Leaving the extraordinary beauty of the workmanship aside, the stones alone were worth a little fortune.

Then Gaspard knew that the captain had indeed found the treasure of Simon Serpente, and, seeing shipwreck before him, had sorted out the most valuable things in a wild attempt to save them with his own wretched life. With the

sweat breaking out on his forehead at the possibilities before him, he flung the serpent of gold on the ground before searching the body. It fell on the swarming crabs. He picked it up and flung it round his own neck. Then he noticed that his hand was bleeding; it had been nipped by one of the vermin which were now crawling up on the body of Sagesse, as the Lilliputians swarmed on Gulliver. Seized with fury, he sprang to his feet and kicked the brutes hither and thither, stamped on them, crushed them. He might as well have stamped on water advancing from an overflowing dam; the clicking and rustling hordes swarmed on.

He flung himself on his knees again beside the body, seized the hand with the ring, drew the jewel off and put it in his pocket. He scarcely noticed that a crab was clinging to the hand as he flung it aside. The left coat pocket of Sagesse was bulging. He thrust his hand in and drew out a knotted handkerchief; it chinked like a bag of marbles, and from a corner a piece of broken gold fell out. It was part of a brooch. He did not stay to investigate further; the handkerchief held treasure. He thrust it into his pocket and went on. There was a pocket-book in the breast pocket of the coat, in the other pockets nothing of value. He opened the waistcoat; he tore open the shirt; nothing more. Wiping the sweat from his brow, he was about to rise to his feet when he remembered that he had not examined the left hand for rings.

He pushed the body over.

The left hand of Sagesse was closed tight on something. The *rigor mortis* was just passing, and Gaspard had no difficulty in unlocking the fingers from the treasure they contained. It was a pearl, a lovely milk-white pearl, large almost as a pigeon's egg. Why he had clung to this thing especially, whether from superstition or not, who can say?

Or was it a pearl not belonging to Serpente's treasure at all? A pearl of the lagoon that by some extraordinary chance the drowning man had seized upon unknowingly in his struggles? One might almost have imagined this to be the case, for this thing was virginal as the sea and had evidently never been set or worn by mortal.

Who can say? But so the captain of *La Belle Arlésienne* had gone to his Maker, clasping this emblem of purity in his hand, almost a parable on the mighty truth that each one of us, however evil, has yet, in his soul, somewhere, a priceless pearl.

Thoughts that never occurred to Gaspard.

He had risen to his feet. In his pockets lay the plunder he had taken from Sagesse, in his hand the pearl, around his feet the crabs swarming to their prey.

He was rich.

The sea had given him the riches that other men toil their lives for, given it to him in one great glittering handful. He seemed standing before a blinding light. It seemed unthinkable that he who had striven all his life for a pittance, working now as a sailor before the mast, now as a slave in the blind alley of the stokehold, it seemed unthinkable that he should have drawn this tremendous and glittering prize.

As he stood in the blazing sunshine, the wind blowing his hair about his eyes, his eyes staring, astonished, fixed, as though he were gazing at Fortune herself, a black shadow passed over him. It was the shadow of a cormorant.

Away out across the waves other birds were coming to the feast; the wreck and the stranded corpses had been signalled for miles across the sea, for the sea, like the desert, has a watch-tower—the air, and a watchman who never leaves that tower—eternal Hunger.

The bird cried as it wheeled and the cry brought Gaspard to his senses. He glanced up, then down at the swarming beach; then, touching his pocket to make sure that the contents were safe, he turned from the horrors around him and made towards the southern beach, running.

He wished to be alone with his treasure. He shouted like a boy as he ran, taking the road through the bushes that Serpente's sailors had cut for the boat. The jewelled snake round his throat glittered and flashed; never was there a more extraordinary picture than this man, half ragged, his clothes stained with sea-salt, his hair blowing on the wind, the jewelled serpent around his neck, running and shouting as he ran to the desolation around him, and with Fortune.

At the place where the palm trees lay prone on the sand he stopped, sat down, took the serpent of gold from around his throat and placed it on the sand beside him, and beside it the parcel.

Then from his pocket he took the knotted handkerchief and the ring. He placed the ring by the pearl and then he unknotted the handkerchief and poured the contents on the white sand between his legs.

## CHAPTER XLI

### TREASURE

BROKEN bits of gold like the twigs from which jewelled fruit had been torn, spinels, peridots, star sapphires, slab-shaped emeralds, cinnamon stones, a black pearl shaped like a pear, diamonds, an enormous turquoise *de la vieille roche* sun-stricken, coloured, flashing, the treasure of Simon Serpente lay before Gaspard, other treasure there doubtless had been in coin and gold, but this was the cream of it, skimmed by Sagesse, selected no doubt during that calm behind which the sailor's eye had seen the approaching hurricane.

Loot from the towns of Spanish South America, from ships plundered and scuttled, from women and from altars, all lay here in a confusion of colours. Some of these stones absolutely shouted of sacrilege, huge, and splendid, never could they have been worn as jewellery, except by emperors or by jewelled saints in the twilit and incense-laden air of some cathedral. Gaspard knew little of precious stones, but a child or a savage would have guessed the worth of this amazing collection of gems. For a moment after he had turned them out of the handkerchief, his breath came in gasps like the breath of a person dashed with cold water. He could not touch them for a moment, it was as though he were afraid of shattering an illusion. Then came the thought:

They are mine.

He curled his fingers, his lips drew back from his teeth, then he laughed.

They are mine.

He banged his right hand, palm down on the sand beside him, then he clapped his knees with both hands, then, stretching out his hand he seized a wine-coloured amethyst. It was the least valuable stone of the lot, but it was lovely and it lay in his palm like a little lake of colour. He felt its smoothness, turned it about, touched it with his tongue as if he wanted to taste its beauty as well as feel and see it.

It was his, all these things were his and as the thought came back to him he sprang to his feet and with the amethyst in his left hand and his right hand shading his eyes, he looked wildly around him.

Yes, he was alone, no one was watching him; no one was there to dispute his possession; the wind blew and the bay-cedar bushes bent before the wind, the sun shone, the sea burned blue and flashed beneath the sun. In all the island world there was no sign or sound of life save the flickering wings of the cormorants on the northern beach and occasionally their cries.

Loneliness no longer had terrors for him, the sight of a ship at this moment would have flung him into consternation. He, the man who had flung himself face downward in the tent weeping at the thought that it might be months before a ship sighted the island and took him off to begin his long journey back to Martinique and Marie, would, had he sighted a sail at this moment, have cursed it.

With the knowledge of possession had come the fear of dispossession. He had not forgotten Marie, he had not foregone his desire to return to Martinique, but in the first wonderful hours with his treasure, he wished to be alone, to feel it live under his hand, to make plans as to safe dis-



posal, to dream for a while the wonderful dream of wealth here, where there was nothing to disturb him but the gulls and the waves.

Besides, why should he grieve about Marie now? There was nothing to stop him from reaching her, the road was clear before him once he was free from the island, the least of those stones lying there in a glittering heap would give him his passage to Martinique from the ends of the earth.

He looked around at the far horizon—not a sail.

As he was standing thus with his hand in his left-hand pocket containing the pocket-book of Sagesse which he had not yet examined, he felt something beside the pocket-book. A round, hard disc. It was the coin he had picked out of the treasure pit. Rich as he was, this was the only coin in his possession. Then, sitting down on the sand beside his treasure, he began to sort the stones, arranging them in lines according to their colour. Some were unset, others had still clinging to them some fragments of the settings from which they had been broken.

There were seven rubies, all of the true pigeon-blood colour, the least of these was as large as one's little fingernail, the three largest were immense stones as big as the top of an ordinary man's thumb above a line drawn across the base of the nail; it is only in rubies of the true colour and of this great size that the splendour of precious stones finds its ultimate expression. There is nothing in the inanimate world to approach them in magnificence and beauty.

There were seventeen emeralds, ten quite small and inconsiderable, and seven simply priceless, all save the largest, which was starred and flawed.

He arranged these beneath the rows of rubies. Then came the diamonds of which there were forty-eight, not counting the diamond in the ring lying where he had placed

it by the jewelled snake. Some of these diamonds still had the gold of their settings clinging to them, the six largest were the size of hazel nuts and of perfect water. In any market of the world those six diamonds would have fetched thirty thousand pounds and have given a huge profit to the buyer, seven were about half the size of hazel nuts, but of these one was blue and it alone was a little fortune; of the thirty-five remaining three were sherry-coloured and the remainder pure white.

The great turquoise had no companion, he placed it alone on the sand beneath the diamonds, and then, under it, he began to arrange the sapphires; as he was doing it a shadow passed over him, it was the shadow of a frigate bird, flying heavily, gorged with its feast and making south; the same wind on which it was drifting brought with it the clamouring of the cormorants; he rose, glanced around and with dazed eyes looked over the sea, sweeping the horizon; there was no sign of smoke or sail and he sat down again to continue the jewelled pattern on the sand.

He counted the sapphires, two dozen and four there were, varying from cornflower blue to the blue of night, varying in size from the size of a pea to the size of a broad bean. He arranged them between the turquoise. The great amethyst he placed beneath the sapphires, and under the amethyst the spinels, and peridots, of which there were half a handful. The pear-shaped black pearl, the only pearl amidst all these treasures, he placed last.

The white pearl, the ring, and the snake were still lying apart by themselves; besides the stones arranged in lines there were a few fragments of gold, bits of settings, which he disregarded.

Then he sat and contemplated the glittering battalions of his treasure. White, red, blue, the blue of the turquoise,

the wine colour of the amethyst, the black of the pearl, he feasted his eyes on them all. Then, turning on his back, shutting his eyes and casting his right hand backwards across them, he laughed.

He could see them almost better with his eyes shut. That was the most delightful and extraordinary moment in his life, it would have been in any man's life; coloured Fortune, real, tangible Fortune, Fortune in her most beautiful guise at his elbow and the whole blue world before him; what he would do with it all he did not dream; great houses of the wealthy people, snow-white yachts that he had seen in the various parts of the world, the vision of the saloon of the *Rhone* laid out with cut glass and flowers arose before him for a moment; all that belonged to the world of the wealthy, all that world was his now, but he built no imaginary palaces yet, just for the moment the sensation of possession was all powerful, he wanted nothing else.

Marie was fully alive and in the background of his mind, and the knowledge that his wealth would enable him to reach her was there and formed part of his satisfaction; but he saw nothing truly yet but the great, blinding light that Fortune was flashing in his eyes.

As he lay, the wash of the waves on the desolate beach, the blowing of the wind across the bay-cedar bushes, the crying of the frigate birds and cormorants came to him like sounds heard in a dream.

Then the crying of the birds led his thoughts back to Yves and Yves led him back to the stokehold. He could hear the roar of the furnaces and the boom of the sea, the clatter of the ash lift, the clash of the furnace doors. The vision of Fortune had driven all that from his mind. In the last couple of hours, he had passed through an amazing

development; all the nobility and pride in his nature had been quickened into life, latent powers until now unsuspected were awakening in his being, wealth, and the power of wealth were at his disposal. He felt like some exiled king who had at last come to his own, and then, lo and behold, like some horrible poor relation into his dream stepped the stoker of the *Rhone*. Gaspard Cadillac, the Moco, came to spoil the dreams of Gaspard Cadillac, the wealthy man. Wealth, that thing for which we all crave, had been in his possession scarcely an hour when it hit him a blow.

"Hi, there, you dog of a Moco, hurry your stumps, down to your furnace, vite!—vite!—vite!"

Those words had been shot at him by Cuillard, the chief engineer of the *Rhone* as he had come aboard across the Messagerie wharf at Marseilles before starting. They were nothing to a stoker, but the remembrance of them was bitter now, flame-like hatred against Cuillard shot up in his breast, till he remembered that Cuillard was silent forever out there where the *Rhone* was lying by the reef to southward. But that thought gave him no relief against the past that Cuillard's words had evoked. That wretched past! No present wealth could atone for all those years of his life and their slavery. Yet only a few hours ago that past had seemed not amiss!

Truly the lamp of fortune lights many things besides happiness.

He sat up and looked at his hands. They were the hands of a stoker and nothing on earth would make them anything else. He was not ashamed of them, he was not thinking that in the future those hands would proclaim him what he was. No, but he was thinking of the black years those hands had done slave's work whilst here was lying the

wealth that would have raised him to a high position in the world. Ah! could he have bought those fifteen years back, he would at that moment have given half of the glittering stones to Time, utterly forgetting that in that bargain he would have lost a white pearl beyond all earthly jewels—Marie.

The wind had been falling and now was little more than a steady breeze, afternoon was upon the island and the sea was falling with the ebbing tide. He gathered his fortune together into the handkerchief that had contained it, then he placed this for extra security into his own handkerchief. He knotted the corners tightly and then placed the little bundle by the stem of the palm tree nearest him; he placed the snake of gold beside the bundle, the ring on his finger, and the great white pearl in his right-hand pocket.

Then he remembered Sagesse's pocket-book. He took it out and opened it. It contained only papers all wet with sea water and a note on the Bank of France for five hundred francs. He placed the note on the sand with a piece of coral on it to prevent the wind from blowing it away. The sun would dry it. Then he tried to examine the papers, they seemed of no use or importance to him, some were letters with the ink all blurred by the sea water, there were insurance certificates, an old theatre bill of a play performed years ago at a New York theatre, and in one packet a photograph with, on the back, the photographer's name.

Nadan, Photographer. Rue Royale, Nimes.

It was the photograph of a woman, an old peasant woman to judge by the face and cap. Could it have been the man's mother? as likely as not. And he had prized it evidently or he would not have given it a place in his

pocket-book. Why had he kept the theatre bill? Of what romance or villainy was it the reminiscence, of what woman betrayed or man defrauded did he keep it as a memento to be read by Gaspard here, where to the crying of the cormorants, the past of man seemed a game futile and filled with derision. A play of shadows—tricking shadows.

He put the photograph and the theatre bill back in the pocket-book, and the papers; then he made a hole in the sand and buried it. To destroy the past of Sagesse utterly was the greatest act that Gaspard could have performed for humanity, failing that, to bury the records of it was a commendable deed.

He had a flint and steel and the tobacco in his own tobacco box had almost escaped wetting in the drenching of the night before. He filled his pipe and lit it, he had not smoked that day nor the day before and the tobacco, now, had a doubly soothing action on his mind, it chased away the stokehold and his recollections of the past, he forgave Sagesse his villainies, it brought the image of Marie from away across all those miles of ocean, he saw again the early morning market on the Place du Fort. Pierre Alphonse, M. Seguin, and all the gay crowd beneath the blue sky and the dark green tamarinds.

He would find out Pierre Alphonse when he returned and buy him a boat of his own, he would set Marie's father up again in business at Morne Rouge, he would give money to all those people whom Sagesse had defrauded, he would make St. Pierre happy. That good town where the people had been so good to him. Then he would return to Montpellier, at least for a time, and take Marie with him, they would travel first class in the mail boat. He would go down to the stokehold as passengers sometimes did, ah! the stokers on that ship would have a good time when they

reached Marseilles. He would go to the Riga tavern and call for a chopin of wine and see Anisette serve it. Ah, Yves, poor Yves, what a pity that he could not take the great, burly Breton by the hand and give him a fist full of money—so he lay smoking, playing with coloured shadows, spending phantom gold, whilst the voices of the cormorants half unheard, came on the wind across the bay-cedar bushes and the voices of the waves answered them like eternity making answer to time.

Then came the thought, "All that is very well, but how are you to turn your fortune into gold?"

This had not occurred to him before, and at first it seemed a simple matter, just a detail, then he remembered Sagesse's words about governments who were apt to interfere in cases of treasure, men who sprang from nowhere with fictitious claims. Sagesse was afraid of these things and Sagesse was a clever man with thirty years of experience behind him.

To go to a jeweller with those things would be to admit at once the whole secret; to go to a pawn shop with the smallest of those gems would bring on his head enquiries that might prove fatal.

Here was a question to perplex a stoker's mind. His strong hands could fight to protect his treasure, but of what avail was it to protect a useless thing?

He had read the romance of Monte Christo, few French sailors have not, the immortal story that has become part of the history of the world was recalled by him here, lost and alone on the desolate islet of whose existence the great Dumas had never dreamed.

But it gave him little help. He had lived his life in a more sordid prison than that which held Edmund Dantès for fourteen years. That black cell of the Château d'If

had been illuminated by the mind of Faria; the profound intelligence of the Abbé had given the future count not only his treasure, but the genius and the worldly knowledge which enabled him to dispose of it and turn it to account. Gaspard had no such teaching to guide him. The more he thought of the matter the more did his perplexity increase. The world of a sudden seemed to him peopled with robbers, antagonists, men who would take from him by fraud, or law, the thing which was at once his dream and his possession.

The curse of the imaginative mind came on him with full force, the faculty that had once caused a ghost to haunt him on the islet now filled the world with living people and each person an enemy. He pictured men whom he had never seen, not men of his own class, but men dressed as well-to-do citizens, merchants, and so forth, all sworn enemies to him and eager for his treasure. He had once been in a law court, called as a witness in a shipping disaster case; he saw that court now, and the three judges, he was standing before them and they were questioning him.

"Well, where did you get these things? Come, now, they are not yours; you do not find these things in a stokehold."

He sweated at the thought.

Sagesse had spoken of taking the stuff to America; he knew nothing of America. Martinique was the only place he could take it to, the only place he wanted to reach, and, at once, the remembrance of Martinique brought up the image of M. Seguin. Ah! That was the solution. M. Seguin would help him. He had all the worldly knowledge necessary.

For a moment he was satisfied with this way out of the



difficulty, and he began to doubt—not to doubt, exactly, but to hold up M. Seguin's image before his mind's eyes and to question it. "You are a reliable man, I know that, for you are universally respected in St. Pierre; but this treasure—look you, it is enormous, and remember, it is all mine; I don't want to give anyone half shares; I just want some one to turn it into money, letting them take a good profit on the transaction, certainly, but not letting them rob me; would you do this for me? Could I trust you?"

The mental image of M. Seguin, after the fashion of images, made no reply. That hatful of gems, those blazing diamonds, furious rubies, saint-tempting sapphires, all that coloured temptation, who was there in the world that might not yield to it? Only one person that he knew—surely—Marie.

Ah! Could she have peddled them with her other wares, how gladly he would have cast them into her lap without count or toll, but she of all people in the world was most useless for his purpose.

He rose and paced the sands with Fortune, like the Old Man of the Sea, on his back; even in his walk up and down the desolate beach he was tethered by his treasure, for he dared not go far from that magnetic bundle lying by the palm bole; it was absurd to feel uneasy, he knew that; there was no person here to steal it; all the same, it held him close to it.

Now the sun, which had been steadily sinking, touched the western edge of the sea and spilled his glory upon the water, the blue and windy day died and passed at a stroke to the momentary evening of the tropics, and the evening into night.

## CHAPTER XLII

### THE MORNING SEA

IN a moment, night, wearing all her jewellery, was standing above the sea, the wind had died away, the cormorants had ceased crying, and the boom of the waves was the only sound beneath the stillness of the stars.

Gaspard turned to his provision store for supper. He had placed the canned meat and the biscuits close to one of the tree boles, and to-morrow he would have to make a cache to protect them from the sun. Thinking of this, he ate his supper without appetite or knowing what he ate; his mind had passed into that dazed condition which comes from surfeit of sensation; it had fed full of treasure and now was torpid.

When he had supped, he lit a pipe, but scarcely had he done so than sleep came upon him, the pipe fell from his mouth beside him as he lay there on the sands, the stars shining upon him and the sea singing to him; marooned, ragged, without a roof to shelter him, and with the wealth of emperors at his elbow.

Hours passed and the great moving dome of the stars shifted above the world; one might have thought the figure on the sand a corpse cast up by the sea from some wreck. Then it began to move and struggle and cry out; one might have fancied it attacked by some unseen enemy. It was.

Scarcely had the deep unconsciousness of the first sleep lifted, admitting the mind into dreamland, than Gaspard

found himself surrounded by his enemies. He was passing through horrible back streets and men were following him to rob him. Yves, Sagesse, and the chief engineer of the *Rhone* were amongst them.

Then the dream changed and he was standing in a bar with Yves, showing him the treasure, and, behold, the rubies and diamonds had changed to pieces of glass and the rest to sea shells and rubbish—he had not even the price of a drink and he had brought Yves in to stand him a bottle of wine, brought him in arm in arm, boasting of his wealth!

Then he was coming on board at the docks of Marseilles, joining the ship with the treasure in his pocket, the beautiful spirit of unreasonableness who presides over the affairs of Dreamland did not hint to him of the absurdity of the situation, his obfuscated reasoning faculty was engaged in trying to solve the problem before him—the problem of how to hide a million's worth of gems and act as stoker on a transatlantic steamer at the same time. To increase the difficulty he had placed the snake of gold under the muffler he wore round his neck—but it refused to be hidden; and then, all at once, he was back again in the docks in a tavern, fighting in a corner with his back to the wall, whilst Malays from the P. & O. boats, Dagoes armed with sheath knives and a Chinaman—a hatchet man such as he had heard tell of amidst the stokers—attacked him for his treasure. He awoke gasping and still fighting his viewless enemies. After a while he fell asleep again, only to continue his experiences in Dreamland, awaking finally, just as the sun's rim was rising above the sea.

The wind was blowing now from E. S. E., and the sea had lost its waves and had fallen back into quietude and long lapses of swell—the gulls were back.

Not the cormorants and frigate birds of the northern beach, but the fishing gulls, the familiar spirits of the island, whose voices had once terrified Gaspard. They had returned during the night, but they did not terrify him now. Nothing could terrify him now except, perhaps, the idea of a robber.

It was extraordinary, the effect of this fortune on this imaginative mind, stiffening and strengthening it against all imaginary fears save the fear of material enemies. The man who dreads burglars has no time to dream of ghosts.

Immediately on waking he turned and placed his hand upon the treasure, then he sat up facing the brave, bright morning; it was all true, then, despite his dreams and his visionary enemies he was still in possession of this incredible and fantastic wealth; his mind, clear now and strengthened by sleep, could grasp the matter in its true proportions; the stuff was his by all right, he was lineal heir by the right of labour and suffering, to the fortune that Sagesse had taken from the hand of Chance.

He could go to M. Seguin with a clear conscience and ask him to help in the disposal of these things.

He rose up and walked along the beach, every moment casting back an eye at the place where the treasure was. The storm had brought treasure of its own to the beach, other than gems, and the falling tide was leaving behind it strips of emerald and clear-brown seaweed, star-fish, seaweed whose roots were clinging still to fragments of red branch coral, great bunches of flying-fish eggs like bunches of white currants, shells shewing all the tints of opal and pearl.

The great hand of the storm had stripped the sea coves, the tidal rocks, the gardens of the lagoons, and had cast the coloured harvest on the sand; the sea itself had a

brighter look, a fresher smell; great depths seemed to have been stirred and the freshness and youth that lie at the heart of ocean to have been diffused through its being.

O, the vision of the morning sea! The blue distance, the green, curling waves, the blowing wind; it is the only thing that never grows old; unspoiled by time or change, it is to-day as it was when Jason sailed it, when Helen knew it, when the blue-painted triremes clashed beaks at Salamis in the morning of the world.

When we first saw Gaspard, a stoker fresh from the *Rhone*, sitting under a palm tree smoking and waiting for Yves, he was a man who would have been moved not at all by the youth and spirit of this morning sea; the crushed aesthetic sense, the imagination that had been subdued to bar rooms and girls of the type of Anisette, would have responded scarcely at all to this hilarity of blue waves and morning light—but it was different now. He had changed and the world had changed; the change was perhaps more subtle than profound, altering rather the point of view than the viewer, yet he had changed. He had learned to expand his nostrils to the breeze, to feel pleasure in the morning light, and satisfaction in the sense of being.

As he stood looking away to southward over the blue sea, he heard the voice of the spirit that had mostly wrought the change in him. It was the voice of Martinique calling to him, the voice of Marie.

*Ché.*

In a moment and for a moment, Fortune, the island, everything, was forgotten.

*Ché.*

The little word came on the breeze to him. Was she, too, standing on some beach or headland gazing over the sea towards him? Was the little word a butterfly of

thought blown to him on the breeze that was blowing from there?

Who can say, but he heard it as distinctly as he had heard it that evening when standing on the road to Morne Rouge and looking down at St. Pierre, he had waited for her and she had come to him.

He turned away from the sea, then he turned to it again and swept the horizon as though looking for a sail. There was nothing to be seen.

He walked back along the sea edge in the direction of the palms; the seven palms had been cast down by the rush of the hurricane, just as the stakes of a stock fence might be cast down by the rush of wild cattle; now, and for the first time, the thought occurred to Gaspard that with the palms gone the islet would be less likely to attract the attention of a passing ship. He looked at them as they lay, and then he approached the bundle of treasure and the glittering snake of gold, which were lying by the bole of the westernmost of the fallen trees. He touched the bundle with his foot. The action seemed half involuntary; he did not seem to be thinking of the bundle or its contents. Nor was he.

He was thinking of Marie.

A wild longing, such as the prisoned bird may feel for the blue sky, filled him, subordinating everything else to the thought of the being he loved.

Ever since *La Belle Arlésienne* had dropped Martinique behind her this longing had been living and growing in his heart; the treasure fever had obscured it, the storm had veiled it, the finding of the treasure had pushed it aside, but it was there, growing, and patiently waiting. It was the master passion of his life, the thing beside which all other things were nothing, though for a moment

they might veil it, as a cloud veils a star, or a mist a mountain.

He turned away from the treasure and walked towards the bushes, then he began to cross the islet, taking the path that Sagesse's sailors had made for the boat. Though he was profoundly engaged in thought, he noticed quite little things, as, for instance, that the salt crystals were nearly gone from the leaves of the bay-cedar bushes.

Half way across, where a view of the northern horizon could be obtained, he raised his head and scanned the sea line. Nothing—nothing—Ah! stop! What was that?

A tiny flake of feldspar seemed clinging to the sky horizon in N.N.W. In the wonderful half wheel of crystal blue this microscopic flaw might have been passed over by a casual observer. Gaspard folded his arms and stood gazing at this speck, his lips parted in a half smile, his eyes fixed. Had you been close to him, you would have noticed that he scarcely breathed.

The thing did not seem to alter in shape or increase in size, yet he knew that it represented the topsails of a ship hull down on the horizon. It was just so that he had first glimpsed *La Belle Arlésienne* from the open boat.

Then it increased in size. After keeping him in suspense for what seemed an age, suddenly his brain was able to say of the vision upon his retina, "It is bigger."

Then, as he watched it increase, all doubt passed: It was a vessel of some sort steering southward. The wind was blowing now steady from E.S.E.; she would pass the island to westward, perhaps quite close, for it was all deep water there.

His mind, up to the moment of sighting the sail, had been filled with the thought of Marie, the craving for her had brought him here to look out for a sail. Now, after the

first joyous leap of the heart, Marie was for the moment forgotten. It was as though the sail space on the sky had been a doorway through which the world had rushed in upon him.

He turned and ran back to the southern beach, picked up the treasure bundle and forced it into his pocket, picked up the jewelled snake and placed it round his neck under his shirt.

The collar of the flannel shirt scarcely concealed it; it would never do to board a vessel with such a gem so lightly concealed, so, hurriedly, with absurd haste, as though the ship were already abreast of the island and there was not a moment to lose, he stripped off his coat and shirt. For a moment he thought of placing it round his waist, but it was not long enough to serve as a belt—then he did what the jeweller who had designed the thing intended its wearer to do—made an armlet of it.

It clung to perfection, and he resumed his shirt and coat. The banknote that he had taken from the pocket-book of Sagesse, the white pearl, and the gold coin, were all in the left hand coat pocket; he felt them over with his left hand whilst his right examined again the bulge made by the jewels contained in the right hand pocket.

It was not so very noticeable and no one would have dreamed that it was caused by treasure. He looked around him on the sand to make sure that he had forgotten nothing, and then came back to the vantage point in the centre of the islet.

Yes, there she was, palpable to the sight and definite, no longer a smudge on the sky-line, but a vessel with all sail set and steering, one would have thought, straight for the islet.

Then, assured of this, he set to with his sheath knife,



cutting dead brushwood and heaping it on the pathway; the smoke of a signal fire was his only chance of attracting her attention; and having made his preparations he knelt down by the heap and put his hand in his trousers pocket for his tinder box and steel.

It was gone.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### DELIVERANCE

For a moment he knelt helpless, with idle hands. He knew quite well that though the vessel seemed steering straight for the island, she might pass it a long distance away; a smoke signal could not but attract her attention, yet he was debarred from making it.

The tricky spirit that seemed to haunt the islet seemed still active and at work, filling his pockets with jewels, yet holding back from him the means of escape.

He rose to his feet and stared about him, trying to remember when he had last lit his pipe; then he came back along the pathway to the beach, searching the ground, the sand, casting his eyes hither and thither, the sweat running from every pore. He searched the whole width of the beach for twenty yards from the fallen palm trees towards the coral spur; the gulls were calling and fishing as of old and their voices seemed mocking him, he, who, burning for action, had yet to walk up and down slowly as an old man, with head bent and eyes cast before him after the fashion of a penitent.

There was no sign of the box; it was a small affair, one of those cheap nickel tinder boxes they sell to sailors, a "smoker's friend" containing a wheel armed with a bit of flint, a spring which rotated the wheel, and a tiny wick which caught the spark.

He was turning from the beach in despair when his

foot struck against what seemed a pebble half covered by sand. It was the "smoker's friend." It had fallen last night from his pocket and the wind had blown the sand over it. He seized it and with it in his hand came running back to the heap of brushwood. He first turned his eyes to the ship. She was larger, nearer, yet seemingly farther from the track of the island; as far as he could judge she might pass it by some three miles. He flung himself on his knees by the heap of brushwood and pressing the spring of the tinder box, struck a spark. It caught on the inflammable wick, the wick smouldered, and then, as he blew at it, broke into flame. It was a very small flame, not nearly as big as that given by a large sized wax match. Then he approached the tiny point of light to one of the dead twigs of the brushwood. He was kneeling with his back to the wind so as to protect the flame, but for all his care a breath across his shoulder blew it out.

He cursed. Then holding the box close to his body, he re-lit the wick.

The wetting the box had received during the hurricane must have damaged its spirit; yesterday when he had lit his pipe with it he had done so with great difficulty, but the flame was even more feeble to-day; it went out again at the critical moment, and again, and again; the brushwood, perhaps, from the effect of the sea salt that had dried upon it, was hard to ignite; had he but a piece of paper the task would have been easy, but there was not a scrap on the island.

Then he remembered Sagesse's pocket-book, which he had buried in the sand. He was rising to hunt for it when he remembered also the banknote that he had taken from the papers of Sagesse and which was in his pocket.

To find the pocket-book might take a long time, for the

sand had blown smoothly over the place where he had buried it; the banknote was to his hand and would burn bravely. It did.

As it took light, and as its flame took the brushwood, a burst of discordant cries came from the fishing ground of the gulls away to the southeast. They were fighting over some fish, no doubt, or some offal of the sea cast shoreward, yet as the blue smoke curled upwards and as the last of the five hundred franc note burnt Gaspard's fingers, one might have fancied that they were shouting in derision:

"There goes the first of your fortune in smoke—smoke—smoke. Hi, you there amidst the bushes, think you to escape us with Serpente's treasure? It is ours—Hi! do you hear? It is ours—ours—ours—Our voices will follow you wherever it goes, bringing weariness, desolation—death—Hi! Hi! Hi!"

Absurdity, of course, yet the voices of the gulls were a part of the fatefulness of that place, with the blinding light and the desolation, they made its personality—after all, was it absurdity or poetry on the part of the castaway to read into all that a menace, to feel Serpente's fist still closed upon his treasure, to hear the voices of his sailors in the voices of the gulls. No man can say who has not heard the spirit of the sea speak on the quays of Florida, by the lagoons of the coast, on the islands of the Caribbean—who has not seen Laropé's topsails break the horizon, leading into poor reality the hull of some trading ship, or heard the gulls of the lagoons telling the fate of the old buccaneers.

Now the bonfire was burning bravely, and Gaspard, attacking the bay cedars with his knife, cast younger wood upon the flames; it damped them down, but it gave smoke,

blankets and spirals of blue-grey smoke, thickening, deepening, and at last rising in a steady column. He ran to the fallen palm trees and hacked away their fronds, half dried and half withered by the sea; they increased the flame and more green brushwood increased the smoke.

It was now magnificent, a pillar of darkness rising in the air, bending to the wind and breaking into fronds of smoke.

He left it, and shading his eyes stared out across the sea. The vessel was almost abreast of the island, about three miles away to northward, scarcely two miles to westward; she was a small vessel, ship rigged; that is to say, with square sails on all her three masts; she would not be more than two hundred and fifty or three hundred tons.

The wind had veered almost into the east, so she had it on her beam.

She seemed indifferent to all things and as divorced from reality as a painted ship in some brilliant picture of the sea. Never did it seem possible that she would respond to call or signal.

She was abreast of the island now—and now—Gaspard could scarcely believe his eyes—she was altering her course; the wind was spilling from her sails—she was heaving to.

He saw a boat detach itself from her, a tiny speck at first, now larger, now plainly visible; it was making, not for the western side, but for the southern beach, where the landing was good. Evidently the vessel knew the island and had landed a boat here before.

## CHAPTER XLIV

SIMON STOCK

HE made for the beach and stood there waiting. The rocks to westward cut off his view of the oncoming boat and he had time for a moment's thought.

He felt like an actor who had to appear on the stage with a half-learned part. Thinking entirely of how to hide his treasure, he had forgotten to invent a story to account for his presence on the island.

It was too late now, for here came the boat's nose round the western rocks, a large, white-painted boat, flashing eight oars in the sun.

Now she was coming dead on for the beach and Gaspard was wading out knee-deep to meet her. Within ten strokes of the beach, the men ceased rowing and she came bravely on, the bow oar standing up and shouting something in English which Gaspard did not understand; he waved and shouted a reply in French and the next moment he was clutching the thwart, being hauled aboard and shoved aft.

The mate of the vessel, who was steering, a hatchet-faced American, hauled Gaspard down beside him and without waiting for word or question, which would have been useless, considering that he could scarcely speak a syllable of French, shouted orders to the crew and the boat poled off from the shore and began its return journey to the ship.

"French?" said the mate, when they were under way.

Gaspard nodded, "*Oui, oui*," then pointing behind him, "wreck;" it was one of the few English words that he knew. The hands in the boat, all Americans, lean-faced, bronze, chewing as they rowed, looked with interest at the marooned one and made remarks about him one to the other, but the mate, after the first interrogation, seemed to have no interest in anything but getting back to the ship as quickly as possible. There was a life belt in the stern of the boat with the words "Anne Martin" on it.

Gaspard pointed to the name and then at the ship they were approaching.

"Anne Martine?" asked he.

The mate nodded and spat into the sea.

"*Quelle porte?*" asked Gaspard, pointing southward.

"St. Pierre."

"*St. Pierre!*" cried Gaspard. "*O mon Dieu, St. Pierre—St. Pierre Martinique?*"

The mate nodded.

For a moment Gaspard could not believe that such luck was his. Out of thirty or forty possible ports she was bound for St. Pierre, for Marie. Then he laughed and clapped his knees with his hands; the oarsmen laughed half mockingly, poking fun at him in American slang, but the mate did not laugh, he was a man who, to use his own expression, had no use for laughter, besides, his eyes and his mind were otherwise engaged.

Gaspard, in his excitement over lighting the signal fire and the approach of the boat, had forgotten one thing. He was wearing the diamond ring he had taken from Sagesse, a terrible blunder, almost unbelievable, did not one know the capacity of the human mind for error.

The mate, he was first officer of the *Anne Martin* and his

name was Skinner—though he could scarcely keep his eyes from the flashing jewel, said nothing, and now the boat was under the port quarter of the *Anne Martin*, oars were in and Gaspard climbing the ladder which had been flung down, whilst a hard-faced man in a panama, Captain Stock, no less, the master of the vessel, was leaning over the side shouting directions to the mate.

In a moment the crew were on board, the boat swung up at the davits, the braces manned and the *Anne Martin* on her course again.

Then, and not till then, did Captain Stock turn to the newcomer.

"He's French," said Skinner, "wrecked over there, but he's got a diamond on his finger worth ten thousand dollars that wants explaining."

The Captain glanced at Gaspard, fixed his eyes on the ring and then said, "Call Diego, he can chatter to him, it's all the d——d Dago is good for."

It was at this moment that Gaspard, seeing Captain Stock's gaze fixed on his hand, recognised that he was wearing the ring.

In a moment Diego, a fat Portugee, with black curls and earrings, came running aft. Then, through the mediumship of this interpreter, Captain Stock began to question the marooned one.

"How long have you been wrecked?"

"Some days."

"Storm or what?"

"Storm."

"Where did you get that ring you are wearing?"

"Found it."

"Where?"

"On the island."



"Picked it up?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"On the beach."

Here Gaspard broke across the questions with a statement.

"Tell M. le Capitaine the ring is mine. I found it, and I shall sell it at St. Pierre and pay him handsomely for my passage. I have friends at St. Pierre who can speak for me. I want to go on this ship as a passenger; not to work my passage."

"Who can you name at St. Pierre as a friend?"

"Monsieur Seguin—Paul Seguin."

The name appeared to have an effect upon Captain Stock.

"What was the name of your ship?"

"*La Belle Arlésienne*."

No sooner had the words left Gaspard's mouth than an extraordinary change took place in the face of the Captain; long enough by nature, it lengthened still more. He came forward and grasped Gaspard's arm.

"*La Belle Arlésienne!!!*"

"*Oui*."

"Belonging to Pierre Sagesse?"

"Pierre Sagesse—*oui*."

"Was he on board—Hi, you d——d Dago, ask him was Pierre Sagesse aboard."

Diego put the question.

"Yes."

"Was he lost?"

"Yes."

"He's dead—sure?"

"Yes—*O ma foi*, yes. I left him with the crabs eating him."

Stock had been one of Pierre Sagesse's many victims. Stock was not owner of the *Anne Martin*, only master, but he had once owned a ship in the West India trade, had become involved in Sagesse's net and ruined. The hatred of hell would scarcely express in words the hatred of Simon Stock for Pierre Sagesse. No wonder, then, that he did what he did on the news of Pierre Sagesse's death and the statement about the crabs, and what he did was this. Flung up his chin till his scrawny and vulturous neck was sunlit from hyoid bone to sternum, clicked his fingers like castanets, laughed horribly, called the hands aft, ordered Skinner to serve them out a tot of rum all round and, then, taking Gaspard by the arm, led him down the companion-way to the dismal place that went by the name of the saloon.

He opened the door of a dog hole that had served once for a third officer's cabin and Diego, who had followed, translating, he said:

"You can berth here and for nothing, the news that Peer Sagesse is in hell is all the payment I want. Make yourself at home, sonny, call for what you want, drinks or smokes and dinner's at eight bells."

Then he turned on his heel and went on deck, followed by Diego, leaving Gaspard to settle into his new quarters. A palace would not have pleased him better at the moment, than this dingy place. He had dreaded being berthed in the fo'cs'le, to have carried a fortune of many thousands of pounds in gems into such a place, to live in that mixed community for several weeks and to keep the fortune hidden would have been a difficult task indeed.

Here it was perfectly simple, there was an upper and a lower bunk, each with a mattress, there was no steward, so Diego had told him, so there would be no one fussing about making beds. He took the bundle from his pocket and placed it in a corner of the upper bunk under the mattress, as he did so he felt the absolute physical pleasure that comes when the body is relieved of a heavy load. He could move now freely and having closed the door of the cabin, he came on deck.

## CHAPTER XLV

### MOUNT PELÉE

THE good fortune that had followed him pursued also the *Anne Martin*, the wind held steady, the sky clear; flying, fresh weather and a sparkling sea brought her into the Caribbean; they sighted ships but always at a distance, sails that flecked the far off horizon and vanished, long wreaths of steamer smoke, phantoms speaking as vaguely of the world of men as the strips of fucus floating past on the swell.

Not only had they good weather but good temper reigned on board.

Stock, a "hard case" in the language of sailors, had taken in, with the news of Sagesse's death, a cargo of good humour that promised to last him till they fetched Martinique.

Gaspard had his meals in the cabin, with the few words of English that he knew and a few more that he picked up daily, he could make his wants understood without the assistance of Diego; as for conversation, he did just as well with his half dozen words as with a thousand, for conversation there was none amidst the after guard of the *Anne Martin*.

As day followed day and Martinique crept closer to them, so did the idea of Marie grow in Gaspard's mind, ousting the idea of Fortune and all other ideas and pre-occupations. Just as, on the approach to Skeleton Island,

the vision of treasure drove her image from his mind, now on his approach to Martinique, so did her image cast out the vision of treasure. If he thought of his wealth at all, it was only connection with her.

One night, under a sky blazing with stars, he was standing on deck watching the phosphorescent gleams in the water. Captain Stock, who had just emerged from the cabin companion-way came towards him, leaned over the bulwark, took his cigar from his mouth and expectorated into the sea.

"To-morrow," said the Captain, pointing right ahead.

Gaspard started.

"Martinique?"

"Yes."

Then the Captain went forward, leaving Gaspard alone.

He knew they were close to the island, but he had not reckoned that they were so near as that.

To-morrow, he would see Marie to-morrow. To-morrow, he would be walking the pleasant sunlit streets of St. Pierre, he remembered the shops of the Rue Victor Hugo. O, what would he not buy her! He would take her and say, "All St. Pierre is yours—take what you please."

Then he cast his thoughts abroad, all through St. Pierre, wandering hither and thither, and touching this person, and that, with a loving hand. Man'm Faly, Pierre-Alphonse, the girls who were Marie's friends. Finotte, Honorine, Lys, they would all share in his jubilee, and there was something grim in the idea that the pleasantest thing he was bringing with him, the thing that would make him most welcome in the coloured city, was the news of Pierre Sagesse's death.

He went below and turned in, and fell asleep with his mind full of these pleasant imaginings.

This was the season of the most heavy rains and he had been asleep scarcely an hour when the *Anne Martin* sailed into a rain squall, and the thunder of rain on the deck reached him in dreamland.

The scenery of his dreams at once took the form of the little Place de la Fontaine, where he had first met Marie. He was walking there with her and the sun was shining brightly, the sky was blue. Then, all at once, he lost her. She had vanished amidst the crowd of dream people who were strolling through the Place.

Then, just as on the day he first met her "clash—ripple—clash" came the *carillon* of the cathedral bells, but they did not bring him to Marie, clouds darkened the sky and the thunder of rain filled the air, and through it all the bells ringing on joyous, triumphant, golden, like the voice of the love that lives beyond disaster and death—Then he awoke.

It was pitch dark and the thunder of the rain on deck was ceasing.

He lay awake for an hour and then he slept again, only to repeat the dream.

A little after dawn he awoke with the bells sounding so loudly in his ears that he could have sworn they were anchored in the bay and that the cathedral was greeting them with a peal, but he knew by the movement of the ship that this was not so.

He put his hand into the upper bunk, and taking the treasure bundle from beneath the mattress, put it in his pocket. Then he came on deck.

The sun had already shewed himself just above the horizon, but the sky was clouded to southward and rain squalls dimmed the horizon.

S. S. E. and perhaps not more than ten miles away lay

Martinique with Pelée wrapped in ragged and dirty-coloured clouds. He looked like a king whose robes had gone to tatters till the sun rising more fully, touched him with gold, and white, and pearl against the deepening blue of the sky.

Gaspard gazed awhile at this majestic sight. They had not opened the Bay of St. Pierre yet, but the *Anne Martin* was already altering her course and in half an hour or less they would have the bay and city full in view.

Dominica to eastward lay unclouded, haze-blue upon the morning sea, beautiful as a dream.

Gaspard, turning from the weather bulwarks on which he had been leaning, began to cut some tobacco in the palm of his hand and to fill his pipe. Whilst he was engaged in this business, he heard a hurried footstep and Skinner came running aft.

The mate darted down the companion-way to the cabin and almost immediately reappeared with a telescope; after him came Captain Stock, a pair of marine glasses in his hand.

The two men went forward to the bow. Gaspard followed them. He judged from their manner that something of interest had hove in sight and he was not wrong; leaning against the weather bulwarks a little forward of the foremast, Skinner clapped the glass to his eye and pointed it at Martinique. Stock raised his binoculars. At that moment, there was nothing to be seen, for the clouds on Pelée had fanned out and the bay of St. Pierre was veiled by sheets of sun-dazzled rain, then, against the vanishing clouds, slowly appeared the stem of a broken arch, the foot of a rainbow. It passed with the clouds and the sun struck Martinique.

The sun was high now and it struck the western coast

over the shoulders of Pelée and the mountains; not a cloud lingered upon the island, except a cloud, a cone of smoke rising from Pelée, yet to Gaspard as he strained his eyes, it seemed that a thick grey cloud clung to Pelée from apex to base, clung to St. Pierre, veiling the coloured houses utterly from sight, and to the whole arc of the bay, hiding the trees, the triumphant palms, the angelines, the tamarinds.

"My God!" said Skinner. The hand that held the glass was shaking, his face had become bloodless under its bronze. Captain Stock, the binoculars still glued to his eyes, was talking rapidly to himself in an undertone. Gaspard, who could not see as they saw, who could not understand as they understood, could, yet, comprehend dimly the terror before him, sunlit, and facing the gem-like sea.

St. Pierre had vanished utterly, Pelée was no longer the verdant mountain towering triumphantly above the flower-like city; a cone of dismal ashes smoking to the sky, above a land of dismal ashes, that was all there was left of that lovely world. And it was all so still, so peaceful with the peace that hangs over ruins of great antiquity!

Yet, but a few weeks ago, Pelée was youthful with foliage, the *canotiers* were paddling in the sapphire bay, the city was waving its flags to the sun, mirroring its coloured houses in the water. The children were singing their songs and telling their Tim-Tim in the streets. The market-place was gay with life, the gardens gay with colour, the streets with laughter and over all hung the poetry of eternal summer. And now all that was with Thebes, with Nineveh—a world of ashes, desolation, silence.

Stock, the Yankee skipper, a man whom few things could move, lowered the glasses, pressed his left hand tight over his eyes as if they had been hurt by some painful light and



then, leaning over the bulwarks, became violently sick.

Gaspard, who had seized the glasses from his hand, looked. As he looked he swayed from side to side as though the vision before him had grasped him by the shoulders and he was wrestling with it.

Skinner caught him as the glasses fell from his hand. He had fainted and Diego, with the assistance of another sailor carried him below and put him in his bunk.

Captain Stock and the mate followed, they loosed his collar and left him lying whilst they sat down at the saloon table and Diego fetched them rum.

It was British Navy rum, thirty above proof and it gave them the stiffening they required.

"It's that cursed mountain," said Stock at last. "She's blown her side out—must have occurred just after we left Boston or we'd have had news of it by cable from some of the other islands, sure."

They rose to go on deck, but before doing so they looked in to see how Gaspard was doing.

He had recovered consciousness, but he lay like a man dazed after some terrible accident. His eyes were fixed as if on some form seen only by himself and on his cheek there were tears.

They spoke to him and he heard, but he made no reply, only a movement of the hand as though to say, "Let me be."

## CHAPTER XLVI

### ASHES

WHEN they came on deck, the vessel, still on her course had drawn nearer to the land, several men-of-war and relief ships were at anchor in the bay.

The crew of the *Anne Martin* were held spellbound by the disaster, just as their officers had been. Nor did use to the scene break the spell, for the nearer they approached the more appalling did the picture of destruction appear.

Had you not known of the catastrophe, had you not known that this place a few weeks ago was the most beautiful corner of the world, you would have said, "this is surely the great cinder dumping ground of the universe. Here from the beginning of time men have cast their ashes and cities their detritus, if I were to poke a stick amidst all that I would surely find amphorae from Sparta and broken gourds from Nineveh along with the empty tomato tins and the broken crockery-ware of the modern world. What a horror. How dare Time expose this rubbish heap to insult the gaze of the Creator, this monstrosity of desolation to insult the eye of man."

And even then you would not have felt the heart of this great desolation, you would not have heard the voices of the gardens, the complaint of the *fleur d'amour*, the weeping of the gouyave water, the voices of the vanished streets. You would not have known that beneath that miserable rubbish of nature, that dust, grey as the brick dust of the old

grey temple of Ruin, lay children grasping their toys, girls once more beautiful than the flowers in the gardens, men, young, and brave, but a few weeks ago, and filled with the joy of life, Pierre-Alphonse, the kindly fisherman and Man'm Faly the good-hearted friend of sailors.

Even still, amidst the ruin one might see some trace of the configuration of the city, just as in a face ruined by some terrible disease one may recognize the ghosts of features.

A gun followed by a signal from one of the war vessels, made the *Anne Martin* heave to. The bay was full of wrecks and dangerous to navigation. In-shore lay the cable ship *Grappler*, sunk with all hands, further out all the shipping that had been in the bay on that fateful morning lay fathoms deep withered by the burning scoriae—all save the *Roddam*, that gallant ship saved by the energy and heroism of her commander.

Warned by a boat from the warship, Captain Stock put the *Anne Martin* about and made for Fort de France down the coast, there to wait for orders from the owners.

When the vessel was on her new course, he went down to see how Gaspard was doing. He was lying just as he had been left, still staring straight before him, not vacantly, but as if at some definite vision.

When he had looked through the marine glasses, when he had swept the scene of destruction from smoking Pelée to the sea, the whole tragedy was made plain to him, even to its cause. The place he loved, all that he loved, everything that meant life to him had vanished.

His was the greatest tragedy in which a man has ever been condemned to act. He had sailed, leaving the lovely city and the woman he loved gazing at him until dimmed by the veil of distance, he had returned, raised the veil, and found—this.

The immensity of it almost made it a thing impersonal without in the least destroying the anguish of it. As he lay there in his bunk he saw Marie and he saw himself, he saw the city. He saw the Rue Victor Hugo and the blue sky, the Place du Fort, and the waving tamarinds; he heard the voices of the people and the *carillon* of the cathedral bells, and all that seemed the scenery of a beautiful play, acted under a summer sky in a land of impossible happiness—gone now as though it had never been.

Marie had never been, surely she had never been, never had he met her in the Place de la Fontaine. Those coloured streets, those gay people, that town of pictures, those flowers, and trees, all that was an illusion so it seemed to his mind, whilst his heart, broken, yet still beating, told him indistinctly that all this had been, living, warm, and real. Real as Marie now dead and lost to him forever.

## CHAPTER XLVII

### THE FOOTSTEP IN THE DUST

ST. PIERRE had passed away and with St. Pierre, Marie, and with Marie his will to live.

The extraordinary and most tragically poetic part of his drama was the manner in which St. Pierre, the lost city, clung to the vision of the woman he loved.

She wore it as a garment; he saw her surrounded by its beauty; dawn lit her in the Street of the Precipice, morn in the music-haunted Place de la Fontaine; evening in the twilit Jardin des Plantes.

The super-mortal tragedy of the city had raised her image to supernal heights. The passion, the agony that lives alone in the highest poetry had mixed itself in this common man's tragedy. The city obliterated from the world was part of his grief.

As he lay like a man fascinated by a serpent, motionless, scarcely seeming to breathe, with eyes fixed, and pupils dilated, the roar of the anchor-chain through the hawse pipe shook the vessel. He sat up, leaning on his elbow, exactly as a man sits up who has been awakened suddenly from sleep.

A disc of reflected sunlight, liquid and tremulous as the water from which it was reflected, was cast by the port-hole upon the wall of the cabin; it trembled and moved to the motion of the vessel as she rocked at her moorings.

He gazed at it, following it with his eyes as it leapt and quivered; then, slipping from the bunk he stood erect on the floor of the cabin.

He was fully dressed and, in the act of stepping from the bunk, his full strength seemed to have returned to him. He opened the door of the cabin and a moment later he was on deck.

All the crew were gathered forward; a boat was rowing away from the ship, Captain Stock and the mate were in it, and they were making for the nearest war-ship. The *Anne Martin* was close in shore and the vast, formless, blanketed city cast its chill gray reflection on the water of the harbour. Mounds of ashes terraced by the heavy rains, wildernesses of ashes mounting to wildernesses of ashes, ghosts of buildings vaguely outlined beneath their cerement of ashes—cinders, dust, and ashes, and from all that immensity of desolation not a sound, save now and then a call from one of the working parties, half invisible amidst the ruins.

He cast his eyes over it all and then up to Pelée still fuming in the windless blue; like a madman, exhausted, the great mountain seemed inexpressibly sinister above the ruins of the city it had protected for long years, fed with the gonyave water, sheltered from the winds. Gaspard stretched out his arms, his fingers were crooked, it was as though the man were saying to the mountain, "Ah, what would I not do with you, if I only had you in my grip!"

Then he clambered over the starboard rail.

The men forward did not hear the splash, nor did they notice the black head of the swimmer passing towards the shore.

He had not even kicked off the deck shoes he was wearing, he swam with ease and half unconsciously; in his condition all things were possible to him, he would have guided his way through a turbulent sea just as surely as across this summer-smooth harbour. And now he was clinging

to the angle of a great block of stone shaken out from the once quay-wall and slobbered round by the tide. He dragged himself on to it, and from it to the next.

The Place Bertine had been here; here in the sunlight the tamarinds had shaken their leaves to the wind and cast dancing shadows on the sun-smitten pavement, the songs of the *canotiers* had mixed with the sounds of trade—here where tamarind trees would bloom no more; where the blasting scoriae had fused broken stones and broken building; where the sunlight was horrible.

Around him lay nothing but mounds where once the sugar barrels had been piled, where buildings had been. Mounds like the sand dunes on a desolate coast. A little wind had arisen and, just as amidst the dunes the wind brings the whisper of sand, here, it brought the faint silky whisper of dust.

He had no objective—no object, here, but to feel the ruin; to touch it, walk amidst it, become part of it. To torture his soul. All this was her bed, the dust he trod on her winding sheet, the desolation her silence.

He passed amidst the mounds. In the great mountain of ashes before him the rains had washed out what seemed the bed of a mountain torrent. It had once been a street. He began to climb it. This horrible ravine was tainted by a faint sickly smell of corruption, the crust of the scoriae broke beneath his feet so that he plunged sometimes knee-deep, the sweat ran from his brow, and the sun struck fiercely on him. The heat was terrific. Never, even in the old days of the stokehold, had he experienced such heat, yet still he climbed.

He had reached, now, a transverse ravine, a huge donga with steep banks from which here and there broke out the walls of ruined houses. It was the Rue Victor Hugo.

The silence here was terrible, the silence of Nineveh, the silence of the Nothing, which is at the heart of things. Finotte and Lys; the corrossole sellers; the merchants and traffickers; the coloured crowd; the little children—nothing spoke of them here.

And, still, far above him went the mountain of ashes, the broken streets, walls that had once been houses, charred stumps that had once been palm trees. And still he climbed. He had cast off his coat, never thinking of the treasure in its pocket, he had forgotten all that, even Marie had become vague as a ghost in his mind. One thing only stood clearly before him, half-mesmerised as he was by exhaustion, heat, and the ruin around him—the beach of Grande Anse. The soot-black beach and the green curling waves where a man might find oblivion. He did not know in the least that it was the vision of Marie that was calling him to the cliffs, where he had first truly met her face to face.

At noon, broken, dazed, grimed with dust, having a dozen times escaped by a miracle from death, he reached the summit of the ruins of St. Pierre, and the path of ashes that had once been the road to Morne Rouge. Gazing from here, and not glancing at the ruined city, nothing had altered. The sea lay the same as of old, and Dominica shewed ghostly and haze-blue on the far sea line, gulls were flying over the bay. Eternal summer sat by the ruined city, voiceless, and lost in eternal sleep. Though the silence of the Rue Victor Hugo had been broken by no sound, up here, could be heard a faint breathing from the sea. The requiem of the ocean whose tide was now flooding into the bay.

“Ah, the palms, the coloured houses, the old sea-steps I used to wash—the voices of the *canotiers*, the tall ships I brought thee, where are they?” Vaguely, like a voice heard in a dream came the whispered lament of the sea.



Gaspard did not hear it. He paused only to rest and breathe, he had slipped and fallen many times in his ascent; coatless, his arms were clay-coloured with sweat-caked volcanic dust; his face was frightful; grimed and seamed—it looked as though spat upon by Ruin. In a few short hours his eyes had become sunken, his cheeks had fallen in; his lips baked and parched, and caked with dust were inhuman, the lips of a tragic mask of antiquity. A frightful thirst filled him, obliterating all other feelings. Beneath him lay the city, formless and bulked out with cinders and dust, exactly as the ship of coral had once lain beneath him bulked out with coral in the still lagoon.

Ah, that night when he had turned with Yves from the vision of the sunken ship, feeling that what he had seen was evil; could he but have seen this greater vision! This greater story of man's futility and the fate of the imaginers of vain things!

He turned, seeing nothing of it all but the great white sheet of light that leapt from the horizon half-way to the zenith, and the dazzle of the sea.

He came along the path of cinders that had once been a road set with grenadillas and palms; merry with mule bells and songs of the cane-cutters by day, drifted over by fire-flies at night. The volcanic dust, the sun, the terrible climb amidst the ruins had called up the thirst which is known only in the desert. He walked scarcely knowing where he went, casting his eyes from side to side of the way in search of water. He had forgotten the black beach at Grande Anse and his desire for the oblivion of the sea; he had only one immediate desire, to drink.

Thirst in its acutest form like this is quite divorced from the sensation which civilisation knows as thirst. It is a passion far stronger than hatred or desire, it affects the soul

no less than the body, it drives all other feelings before it and reigns supreme. The physical pangs are nothing compared to the mental desire which drives all other desires away.

As he turned the shoulder of Pelée, the ashes ceased on the road giving place to volcanic dust, for only St. Pierre and the western portion of the island had been exposed to the full blast of the eruption. The road became a road again, and, had he possessed eyes to see, hope might have come to him.

For here, where Marie used to pause of a morning to drink in the view before her, still lay the view as of old. The volcanic dust that had lain grey on tree and shrub, had been washed away by rains, and the green waving canes, the palms, and wild pines, the tamarinds, and ceibas, the mornes, mountains, and valleys lay stretched before him; who saw nothing of it all, walking like a somnambulist in the dream of thirst.

He had passed Morne Rouge where there was no sign of life, and the Morne d'Avril was showing green, but unseen, before him when the voice of water, liquid, and laughing, broke the silence. It was a way-side fountain. Crystal water spouting from a moss-grown lion-head.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was like drinking life; the mountains in the distance became mountains again; the wind, the wind; and the sunlight, the sunlight; the world of shadows and semi-delirium through which he had been walking, faded away. Like a good enchantress, the water had washed away the stains of his journey and the thirst from his soul. In that moment, just like one convalescing from a severe illness, he felt new-born. He was seated upon a bank, and above him in the trade wind waved the huge fronds of ferns, and before him

lay a field of canes overripe, that had been spared the cane-cutters' knives.

Half drowsy, still exhausted, but wrapped in the new feeling of well-being, like a man who is recovering from an anaesthetic, he noted his surroundings; and, as his eyes travelled from point to point, they suddenly came to rest on a spot just before him.

On the dust of the road, sheltered by the bank and the ferns from the wind, lay the imprint of a naked foot. A woman's little foot had pressed the dust of the road but a short time before; the print was warm to the sight and living, one could almost see the fleeting figure swiftly moving as the breeze, and graceful as the bending palm. The print of the heel was far less marked than that of the fore part.

The volcanic dust, though gone from the foliage, still lay upon the road, and on this dust of ruin lay the woman's foot mark, vivid, triumphant over death. Gaspard gazed at it. He glanced at the fountain beside him singing and laughing beneath the shadow of the ferns, then he remembered. It was here that he had paused that day with Marie; it was here that she had given him the ratifia, it was here—it was here.

He rose to his feet, gazed again at the mark in the road and followed its printing. Farther on he lost it, for the wind had blown the dust across it; further on he found it, very faint, but still discernible.

Then, where a little side path broke off from the road, he found it clearly again.

She had taken the path.

Along the National Road you find many paths like these. Short cuts to villages, paths used by the cane cutters and

market folk, often mere traces half smothered by the tropical grasses.

He followed the path which led towards a wood of ceibas and angelines, palms with enormous trunks, thick as the trunks of full grown oak trees; tree ferns and wild pines.

As he came a voice hailed him from the liquid shadow of the trees, it was the voice of the *siffleur de montagne*; clear, silvery, bell-like, the voice of the bird came through the silence of the sultry noon. There was no other sound but the stirring of the palm fronds in the wind.

Here, amidst the trees, by this old forgotten pathway lay a shrine to the Virgin; one of the thousand shrines that are found on the roads and pathways of Martinique. As he pushed the lianas and the air-shoots of the wild pine aside, a voice other than the voice of the *siffleur de montagne* met his ear. The bird had ceased, and through the murmur of the wind in the trees came this voice; the voice of a woman, sweeter than the voice of the bird.

\* \* \* \* \*

Moving silently as a shadow, pushing the leafy veils aside, scarcely breathing, he reached a point from which he could see vaguely in the twilight of the trees the shrine and the woman kneeling before it.

Her voice was clear now, and the soft, childish Creole words of the votary came to him for whom she was giving thanks.

No supplicatory prayer was this, but an assured thanksgiving for the safety of one who had been spared the darkness and the terror of chaos, the horror of death, the fate of her ruined world, for one who was safe and who would return. "At morning, noon, and evening, I have praised thee on my knees—"

It was the noonday prayer—and it passed devoutly from a prayer of praise to one of supplication. Supplication for the souls of the dead and for the living, for Missie Seguin who had been spared even as she had been spared; for herself, a creature not deserving the protection that had saved her, that had led her away to the safety of Grande Anse when Pelée had spoken and the world had fallen in ruins.

Then she rose to her feet, the white magic of Love and Faith still like a light upon her face. As her eyes fell upon the man standing beneath the trees, for one divine second she paused with breath caught back, spirit like, and ringed with the twilight as with a charm.

\* \* \* \* \*

Where the trade wind was blowing and the green waves breaking on the beach of Grande Anse, welcome and a new life were waiting for them.

The man he had saved from the *fer de lance* had the will and the power to open the doors of a golden future for them, yet they could not break from yesterday so soon.

Heedless of time or place they sat by the road-side fountain, till the shadows were lengthening on the road and the valleys humming with night. Darkness found them on the ruined road above the ruined city.

They had come almost unconsciously to look at it again, to breathe the air of the past through which they had so miraculously wandered, and, as they stood clasping one another, gazing through the vagueness at the lights of the warships in the bay, the sea of a sudden became touched with silver and the rising moon broke above the shoulder of Pelée.

The light flooded across the harbour and struck the shrouded city like a tide. The ruins of the Place Bertine

came into view; its broken and veiled cathedral, the thread of darkness outlining the Rue Victor Hugo.

In the moonlight the desolation became robbed of its terror and all was touched with the poetry of deep antiquity, from the flooding sea to the forms of the lovers set far above the ruins.

THE END.

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